Intellectual Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Ernest Renan and Émile Zola: Traitors or Patriots?

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Abstract

Intellectual Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Ernest Renan and Émile Zola: Traitors or Patriots?

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In 1870 a brief war between France and Prussia left France defeated and in chaos. Intellectuals of the day were caught unprepared for this disaster and reacted to it in different ways. Ernest Renan and Émile Zola remained in France during the war and the civil strife that followed. Civilians in a time of national disaster, both men took different views of the crisis. Renan saw himself as the "moral conscience of France," while Zola assumed the role of the young republican patriot. Although of completely different characters and background, they shared two qualities: morality and truth. Renan thought immorality was caused by the country's fall from religious grace, while Zola recognized the disaster as a result of immoral class differences. Renan and Zola were accused of anti-patriotic activities in 1870, charges which stemmed directly from their roles during the war and in the period following it. Neither one was a traitor or unpatriotic; rather, they both reacted in their own fashion: Renan in terms of religious morality and Zola in secular republican sentiment. Each man was particularly bound to his country and both proved able prophets of the future. Charges that Renan and Zola were traitors existed into the twentieth century with diverse factions in French political society using both men's 1870 activities to promote their own causes.

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In the summer of 1870, the European peace was rudely disrupted by a war between France and Prussia. The sudden crisis burst upon the French scene at a time when prospects for international peace appeared strong. On 30 June, the liberal leader of the Imperial government, Emile Ollivier, felt confident enough to say, "In whatever direction we look abroad, we find no pressing problems."[1] Events quickly proved him wrong two days later.

The initial conflict was over an insignificant incident involving the candidature for the vacant Spanish throne. The Prussian government, wishing to expand its authority, proposed a minor Hohenzollern prince as the King of Spain. France, not wanting further Prussian influence, protested. The King of Prussia, Wilhelm I, agreed to withdraw the proposal, but Prime Minister Bismarck, recognizing a chance for war, used a clever manipulation of words to alter a telegram, so that France appeared to be the aggressor in a sensitive diplomatic situation.[2] The French were outraged; after a flurry of diplomatic activity, they declared war on 14 July. A fierce but shortlived conflict resulted in the defeat of France on 1

'In May 1870, after a plebiscite on constitutional reform, Émile Ollivier, leader of the parliamentary majority in the French Legislative Body, became Prime Minister. John Bierman, Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 322.

[2]Ibid., 326-327. King Wilhelm I of Prussia (1798-1888) in 1871 became German Emperor, Wilhelm I. His Prime Minister was Prince Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), who became the first Chancellor of the Empire.

September.[3] Quickly following the government's fall on 4 September, the victorious Prussians surrounded Paris and within days a siege began.[4] In February 1871, Bismarck dictated the terms of an armistice to the Provisional Government of National Defence. France was forced to hand over the eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia and to pay an indemnity of five billion francs to the Prussians.[5]

The defeat destroyed the long-accepted belief in France that the army was invincible. National humiliation increased once it was realized that one nation, rather than a coalition of several, had inflicted the fatal blow. In March 1871, while the Prussians still occupied France, civil war broke out. "L'année térrible," as it became known, included the brutal rule of the Commune in Paris, and ended in May with a violent outburst known as "Bloody Week."

The years immediately preceding the Franco-Prussian War had witnessed startling changes in Europe. In Italy nationalist and republican agitation forced the Pope to rely on the protection of French troops from 1849. Under threat of war Napoleon III in 1870 withdrew this garrison; this allowed

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[3]The Battle of Sedan, 1 September 1870, was an overwhelming defeat for France. Emperor Napoleon III was taken into captivity in Germany and the Second Empire fell.

[4]The bombardment of Paris began 6 January 1871. The city capitulated 28 January 1871.

[5]Treaty of Frankfurt, 26 February 1871, ended the Franco-Prussian war. Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War; The German Invasion of France 1870-71 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), 448-449.

Italian royal troops to take over Rome, leaving the Pope a virtual "prisoner in the Vatican."[6] This was, perhaps, more calamitous to French Catholics than their own problems at home.[7]

Until the mid-1860's Prussia had been subordinate in the race for military power. However, a new breed of Prussian generals who were military technocrats had reorganized the army along the lines of meticulous planning. They believed that wars would be won by precision and scientific prowess. Consequently Prussia had emerged as a strong, efficient and well trained military power. The French army had remained glamorous, but had not been organized as its Prussian counterpart had.[8] In short, war had become a science to the Prussians, while it remained an art to the French. The ethic of hard work, discipline and spartan values that Prussia espoused contrasted strongly with the relaxed French lifestyle nurtured under the reign of the Second Empire.

From 1848-1870, France was ruled by Napoleon III, who became Emperor in 1851.[9] Beginning in 1860, he demonstrated

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[6]Name given to his particular situation by Pope Pius IX.

[7]Philip Spencer, Politics of Belief in Nineteenth-Century France (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), 240.

[8]Bierman, Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire, 333.

[9]Emperor Napoleon III (1808-1873). First elected Prince-President of Second Republic, 1848. He seized power in a coup d'état, 2 December 1851, that was carefully planned by a small group of his supporters. The leader was his half-brother, the Duc de Morny.

an interest in a united Europe and made some advances toward a liberal Empire.[10] Public feeling in Paris was that the Emperor did not want war with Germany, but loyalty to the Bonapartes was limited and without solid national feeling or strong moral fibre; there was no force around which the country could unite.[11] Some intellectuals who had misgivings about the lack of national identity, felt that the core of the country had been eaten away, leaving it in moral chaos. The Emperor, however, had established a bourgeois regime that generated good financial return and offered an attractive lifestyle for much of the rising middle class.[12] In Paris, he had built a new metropolis that was considered superior to all other large international capitals in Europe. Napoleon's foreign victories in Italy had reassured most people that the country's security was enforced by an army that was invincible. This feeling intensified with invention of the mitrailleuse and the chassepot, weapons considered the most advanced in Europe.[13]

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[10]Primarily in granting some constitutional reforms and in relaxing the stringent press laws.

[11]Alfred Cobban, A History of Modern France, vol.2: 1799-1871 (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 171-183.

[12]Ibid., 221-222.

[13]The chassepot was a breech-loading rifle and the mitrailleuse was a multibarreled machine gun. Both weapons had rapid and accurate firing power at greater range which permitted heavy bombardment of the enemy's rear position and population centers. One million of the chassepots were produced in 1870. Bierman, Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire, 334-335.

Confident public reaction was summarized in a statement by the Imperial Minister of War, General Edmond Leboeuf, who boasted of the army's preparedness: "So ready that if the war lasted for two years, we would not have to buy even the buttons for one gaiter."[14] Popular support was strongly in favor of war until subsequent news of defeats in battle with resulting heavy casualties brought a rapid change of atmosphere.

The nation's anxiety was expressed by the intellectuals of the day in different ways. Like most other Frenchmen, they had not recognized the signs of impending disaster. While some published their analyses of the situation in major works, others demonstrated their personal distress in private correspondence and diaries that would later be published.[15]

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[14]General Edmond Leboeuf, Imperial Minister of War in July 1870. After the French defeats by the Prussians at Froeschwiller and Spicheren, he was relieved of his position by the Empress Eugénie and the Imperial Council. He was sent to the eastern front to take command of an army corps. Bierman, Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire, 329.

[15]An example of a major work would be: Ernest Renan, La réforme morale et intellectuelle, edited with an introduction by P. E. Chavret. (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968). George Sand and Gustave Flaubert carried on a correspondence during the war that was subsequently published. These letters are included in Francis Steegmuller, ed. The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, trans. by Francis y Steegmuller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980-1982). Some other examples of writers who published their impressions of the Franco-Prussian war and its aftermath were: Ludovic Halévy, Notes et Souvenirs 1871-72 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Éditeur Ancienne Maison Michel Lévy Fréres, 1889) and Edmond de Goncourt, Journal des Goncourt: mémoires de la vie litteraire (Paris: Charpentier, 1888-1892). Hippolyte Taine's impressions are recorded in Hippolyte Taine, Life and Letters of Hippolyte Taine, trans. by Mrs. R. L. Devonshire (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1902-1908).

In their opinion, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 represented a watershed in French history, the most dreadful political mishap since the great Revolution of 1789. It was a catharsis for many intellectuals, who saw different reasons for the tragedy.

This thesis will examine the effect that the catastrophe had on two leading intellectuals of the day, Ernest Renan and Émile Zola.[16] During the 1870 crisis, the two men, who had widely differing backgrounds, education and opinions, shared a common fate: both were accused of unpatriotic activity. This thesis will investigate these charges: it will study the reaction of both men and analyze the particular patriotism of each, seeking to counter the contemporary contention that they were acting against the interests of their country.

To the casual reader it would seem strange that Ernest Renan, a man who deemed himself the "moral conscience of France" would be accused of traitorous statements and actions.[17] However, Renan was no stranger to hostile accusations; his radical interpretation of the life of Jesus Christ had provoked a major scandal in the early 1860's.[18]

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[16]Ernest Renan (1823-1892); Émile Zola (1840-1902).

[17]Renan, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, introduction, xxi.

[18] In La vie de Jésus (1863) Renan claimed that Jesus Christ was a historical figure who lived during a specific time period and not the divine son of God. Dora Beirer, "Renan and his Interpreters: A Study in Intellectual Warfare." Journal of Modern History 25, December (1953), 381.

It is usually presumed by students of Zola that his sole patriotic act took place during his defence of Alfred Dreyfus in 1894. Yet in 1870 Zola was already known as a radical and a free thinker. This study reveals that his patriotism really began during the 1870 catastrophe with his promotion of the republican cause. Renan was accused of making hostile public statements against France and in favor of Germany, while Zola was considered a member of the radical left-wing element of society. These accusations were, respectively, to re-occur at different times in each man's career. After their deaths, these charges against Renan and Zola were resurrected, with diverse political elements attempting to use the actions of each man during 1870 to their own advantage.

Ernest Renan, a well-known philologist and orientalist, was personally in favor of a quasi-feudal aristocracy. He was frightened by the establishment of a French republic and the liberal ideas that such a state upheld. Émile Zola, in 1870, was a thirty-year-old bohemian writer living in Paris, hostile to the regime of Napoleon III. The opposite of Renan in personality, Zola had more to lose by taking a political stand than the already celebrated Renan.

While French intellectuals were unprepared for war, their German colleagues seem to have been much more alert to the dangers and more deeply involved in national life. In later years the question, 'What were you doing when the war broke out?' was asked in France as often as similar questions

would be after traumatic public events in the twentieth-century. In answer to that question, it can be stated that most French intellectuals were following their usual habits: few paid much attention to the diplomatic protests that had resulted from the Hohenzollern incident earlier in the summer. Ludovic Halévy's notes are a good example of the prevailing spirit of complacency.[19] Always interested in literary events, he suddenly interrupted his usual theme on 7 July to state: "l'affaire Hohenzollern a éclaté comme un coup de tonnerre."[20] Not particularly upset by this news, Halévy continued his daily routine, reassuring himself that the rumours of imminent war were just that; they would be quickly denied by the government. He felt confident that the new French armaments which had recently undergone successful testing provided security enough for the country. "On est enchanté," he wrote gleefully. Prussia, he said, was looking for a way to save face - "pour sortir d'embarras..." - for the diplomatic gaffe over the Spanish throne question.[21] Later, when he penned a note to his friend, Prévost-Paradol, he concluded that, "Si la Prusse ne recule pas, cette fois, c'est

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[19]Ludovic Halévy (1838-1908) was a French author and diarist. Ludovic Halévy, Notes, quoted in Henriette Psichari, L'heure des Illusions," Renan et la Guerre de 70, (Paris: Michel Albin, 1947), 12-13.

[20]Ibid., 12.

[21]Ibid.

la guerre.[22] His confidence was still such that he was not yet worried, concluding that, "Autant en finir, repète-t-on de tous côtes...Battons-nous tout de suite."[23] The rumours were pushed aside in his mind a few days later when he went for a walk in the suburbs of Dreux. Enchanted at the sight of a country house in the woods, he decided that the conclusion of a postal treaty with America was far more important than problems with Prussia.[24]

Halévy's attitude was typical of most other French intellectuals during the first two weeks of July 1870. As a group they were far more concerned with cultural life in Paris than with political affairs. Their refusal to see what was happening about them is one of the strangest parts of the 1870 conflict. Great was their shock when they learned of the suicide in America of Prévost-Paradol.

Hippolyte Taine, one of the foremost French intellectuals, was in Saxony in July 1870, writing a history of the German people.[25] Taine, like many other French and European thinkers, was a great admirer of German civilization. Quite unaware of the grave international situation, he

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[22]Ibid. Lucien Anatole Prévost-Paradol (1829-1870), French writer and critic. In 1870 he was French ambassador to the United States. Depressed over the grave international tensions in July 1870, he committed suicide.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., 113.

[25]Hippolyte Taine (1813-1893). Renowned French thinker and author. Life and Letters of Hippolyte Taine, vol. 1, 1.

suddenly interrupted his work when a telegram from his family, on 12 July, summoned him home.[26] Incredulous, Taine could not understand why the message stated that he might be unable to cross the German frontier into his native France if he waited much longer.

Victor Hugo, the leading French writer, was living in self-imposed exile in Belgium.[27] He had vowed not to return to France until the regime of Napoleon III had fallen. Although he was not physically present in his native land, his reputation in France was sustained by supporters who led the republican movement in his name.[28] Immediately after the defeat, he began his return trip home; huge crowds welcomed him ecstatically in Paris and followed him to his house.[29]

Gustave Flaubert, who had achieved fame with his two novels Madame Bovary and L'éducation sentimentale, was living at his country estate in Croisset, near Rouen.[30]

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[26]So alarmed was Taine's family by the international situation and the problems that he might encounter trying to get back to France, that the telegram failed to mention that his wife's mother was dying. André Chevrillon, Mon Oncle Taine (Paris: A. Fayard, 1958), quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 14.

[27]Victor Hugo had gone into voluntary exile in 1848 and again in 1851, declaring his intention to never return to France until Napoleon III was driven from power.

[28]The "Hugolâtres" was the name given to supporters of Victor Hugo. Leaders of the group in Paris were his sons and son-in-law.

[29]Victor Hugo, Carnets intimes (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 23.

[30]Gustave Flaubert, French novelist (1821-1879).

Flabbergasted by the events of 1870, he withdrew to the countryside for the duration of the war. Unable to conceive of national defeat, and aghast at published reports of French losses, he was completely overcome. Flaubert felt that this was the worst thing that had happened to France since the Revolution. Severely depressed, he at first considered suicide. More rationally, he became obsessed with a desire to serve his country, enlisting in the French Mobile Guard as a lieutenant. Daily he drilled a small platoon of local men in preparation for a Prussian invasion. When his house was actually occupied by Prussian soldiers, Flaubert fled to Dieppe and Rouen. In 1871, worn-out by the catastrophe, he wrote that if the French people had really understood his novels, they would never have tolerated the establishment of the Commune.[31]

George Sand had eagerly welcomed the Second Republic in 1848, but became just as quickly disillusioned with it.[32] In 1870 she was living at her country estate, Nohant, south of Paris. As a champion of republicanism, Sand was caught between

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[31]Koenraad Wolter Swart, The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 112.

[32]Mme George Sand (1804-1876). French author, well-known for her republican views, she was criticized for basing some of her opinions against the Commune on false news printed in the Versaillais (anti-Commune) press. Her letters from Nohant indicate her isolation and the difficulty in obtaining news. Letters from George Sand to Gustave Flaubert, 14 June 1871 and 6 September 1871, in Steegmuller, The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 178-9.

her own liberal sentiments and the reality of the French situation. She travelled around the countryside during the war, keeping a diary of the reactions of French peasants and their lifestyle. Although informed of the situation in Paris, she was too isolated to understand it.

Louis Veuillot, French polemicist and editor, was the acknowledged leader of the ultramontane group in France.[33] He saw the war as just punishment for French immorality and sinful behavior. He recognized in the defeat the hand of a strict divinity chastising France for the fall from grace and from her position as 'Eldest daughter of the Church of Rome.'[34]

Among those who left France were Taine and Berthelot who went to England.[35] Fréderic Bazille, the promising young French Impressionist artist, was killed in battle.[36] His fellow artist, Auguste Renoir, enlisted in the French armed forces and survived the war despite almost dying of dysentery

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[33]Louis Veuillot (1813-1883). He was editor of the right-wing newspaper, L'Univers and leader of the ultramontane party in France. Spencer, Politics of Belief in Nineteenth-Century France, 145.

[34]Spencer, Politics of Belief in Nineteenth-Century France, 212-218.

[35]Marcellin Berthelot, French chemist (1827-1907). He was Renan's best and lifelong friend. Richard Chadbourne, Ernest Renan (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1968), 17.

[36]Fréderic Bazille (1841-1870). He was killed while on active service at the battle of Beaune-le-Rond. Russell Ash, The Impressionists And Their Art (London: Orbis Publishing, 1983), 22.

in the Pyrenees.[37] Edouard Manet spent the period in England as did artists Monet, Pissarro and Sisley. Paul Cézanne continued painting in Aix-en-Provence, refusing to even acknowledge the war or the events that followed it.[38] Edouard Goncourt, diarist and author, remained in Paris a self-appointed reporter of daily events.[39] Guy de Maupassant served in the army during the war.[40] Therefore, Renan and Zola were unique among French intellectuals: they remained in France and participated actively in the patriotic effort.

Ernest Renan, secluded from the harsh reality of political events in 1870, renewed his contact with leading German intellectuals whom he had met before the war. Renan misinterpreted the real feeling of hatred toward the French that was so rampant in Germany. Anxious to end the fighting, he did not realize that his German intellectual confreres were incapable of reciprocating his gesture. Renan was heavily influenced by what he regarded as the moral ineptitude of France. He attributed all of the country's woes to the licentious living style and recognized divine intervention in

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[37]Ibid., Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919).

[38]Ibid., Paul Cézanne (1839-1906).

[39]Edmond Huot De Goncourt (1822-1896). French author and diarist and founder of the Académie Goncourt. George J. Becker, ed., Paris Under Siege, 1870-71: From The Goncourt Journal (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 1-9.

[40]Guy de Maupassant (1850-93). French author and friend of Zola and Flaubert. Henry Troyat, Maupassant (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 11.

the defeat.

A man of the people, Émile Zola could not have been less like Ernest Renan. One of the young men who put his hopes for a better future in a republic, Zola had undergone extreme hardship in Paris before achieving some literary success in 1864. Forced by circumstances to work during the war as a political journalist, Zola became interested in the conflict. He attributed blame for the war to France's unreadiness, lack of leadership, and - like Renan - to French immorality. His concept of immorality, however, had little to do with religion. Unlike Renan, who laid the blame squarely on the country's lack of morality caused by its lessening Christian faith, Zola based his concept of immorality on social inequalities. He thought class differences immoral; the rich lived luxuriously while the majority of French people lived in poverty or even squalor.

Why, then, do Ernest Renan and Émile Zola, two French intellectuals with opposing viewpoints, make such attractive subjects for a study involving their roles in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870? The answer is that the very diversity of their activities during that time period provides fascinating material for such an analysis, particularly when the similarities that exist beneath their surface differences are revealed. Certainly, studies of patriotism during periods of national crisis are not unique, but work on the individual roles of two prominent, yet very different, intellectuals

involved in the same conflict adds a new dimension to their personalities.

They also represent the response of two different generations to the crisis. In 1870 Renan was at the height of his career, while Zola's fame had yet to peak. Twenty years later, when charges of anti-patriotic activities were levelled at both men, their attitudes and ideas toward the conflict had substantially changed. With the hindsight they had both acquired by 1890, they were able to assess their respective functions in 1870 differently. Thus each man provided his own perspective concerning his role during the war years.

Ernest Renan's attitude in 1870 seemed in many ways to represent those of a previous era: he was an intellectual aristocrat who favored the return of a quasi-feudal monarchy. In spite of this, the war was important to his development as an intellectual, for it forced him to reconsider his attitude toward Germany while simultaneously causing him to realize that the government of the Third Republic recognized the value inherent in the artistic and intellectual community.[41] Thus, even if he did not personally favor a republican regime, Renan was forced to acknowledge the republican government's liberal attitude toward intellectuals.[42] Émile Zola, however, was a

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[41]The government of the Third Republic restored Renan to the Chair of Oriental Languages at the Collège de France in Paris in November 1870. Renan, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, introduction, xix.

[42]Ibid., xviii.

committed young republican, who recognized in the new order that followed the events of 1870-71, the chances for an improved quality of life.

During the lifetime of both men, their activities in the Franco-Prussian war were periodically reviewed and criticized in the French press; after their deaths the issues were forgotten until various events in the twentieth-century renewed interest in them.

In general scholars have overlooked the roles of both men in 1870. The other activities during their lifetimes overshadowed their contributions in the earlier conflict. Renan was held in great esteem in Europe for his work as a philologist and Biblical scholar, while Zola's participation in the Dreyfus Affair effectively excluded his earlier activities. Any work that was done on either man reflected his more prominent role, leaving aside his 1870 performance.

There was, moreover, another reason for this neglect. The twentieth century has dealt harshly with both Renan and Zola. Renan was claimed by the French Right; its reactionary ideology manipulated his philosophy by portraying him as the Father of racism. Use of his name and thought in this way made Renan something of an embarassment for French scholars after World War II. With the exception of a biographical study by his grandaughter, Henriette Psichari, no work was done on him

for almost two decades.[43] Revisionist historians began to resuscitate Renan beginning in the 1950's.[44]

After Émile Zola's death in 1902, and his subsequent reburial in the Pantheon in 1908, little work was done on him for decades. The only evidence of scholarly interest in Zola were the Pilgrimages to Médan that were held in his memory beginning in 1913.[45] Academic writing on Zola did not begin again until the late 1920's.[46] The years of neglect were a result of widespread belief among right-wing academics that Zola was a traitor and arch anti-patriot because of his championing of Alfred Dreyfus. During World War II the Nazis took every opportunity to vilify him as an enemy of the people, while denouncing him as a Zionist and a friend to Jews. The Zola family continued to receive threatening letters

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[43]Henriette Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70 (London: Albion Michel, 1947).

[44]Revisionist scholars include: Jules Chaix-Ruy, Ernest Renan (Paris: Émmanuel Vitte Éditeur, 1956); Richard M. Chadbourne, Ernest Renan (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1968); and Harold W. Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1964).

[45]In June 1908 the government of the Third Republic accorded Zola a hero's burial in the Pantheon. The Pilgrimages to Médan were begun by Zola's son-in-law, Maurice Leblond, as a tribute to Zola. The first one was held in 1913 and there has been one annually ever since. These celebrations in Zola's memory are now held at his former farm in Médan outside Paris.

[46]Mathew Josephson, Zola and His Time (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1929) and Denise Leblond-Zola, Émile Zola raconté par sa fille (Paris: Fasquel Éditeurs, 1931).

for years after his death.[47] During the German occupation of France from 1940-1944, the Nazis utilized Zola's role in the Franco-Prussian war to condemn him as a dangerous radical, as well as someone who had not served in the armed forces. They carefully ignored the fact that he was exempt from military service because of his myopia and because he was the only son of a widow. It was not until the 1960's that new revisionist historians again began to delve into Zola's life.[48] It was in this period that Zola's role as republican and journalist during the Franco-Prussian war came to light.[49]

In the decades that followed the Franco-Prussian war, further charges of anti-patriotic activity were regularly

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[47]Zola's son, Dr. Jacques Émile-Zola, felt that there was evidence that his father had been murdered in 1902. The circumstances of Zola's death remain mysterious even today. Officially the author died of carbon monoxide poisoning as a result of a blocked chimney in his bedroom in his Paris house. Dr. Jacques Émile-Zola revealed in an interview that his father had received death threats for several years before his actual death. Armand Lanoux, "Le Docteur Jacques Émile-Zola et son père," Les Naturalistes (1964): 3. The Zola family, seventy-five years after his death, still refused to publish original manuscripts in their possession for fear of reprisals. Joanna Richardson, Zola, 22.

[48]Revisionist historians include: F. W. J. Hemmings, Émile Zola (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) and The Life and Times of Émile Zola (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977); Armand Lanoux, Zola (London: Staples Press, Limited, 1955); Elliott M. Grant, Zola (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1966); Henri Mitterand, ed., Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Cercle du Livre-Précieux, 15 vols. 1966-69); B. H. Bakker, ed., Zola Correspondance II 1868-1877 (Montreal: Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal, 1980).

[49]Henri Mitterand, Zola Journaliste de L'affaire Manet à L'affaire Dreyfus (Paris: Armand Colin, 1962) and Aimé Dupuy, 1870-1871 La Guerre, La Commune et la presse (Paris: Armand Colin, 1959.

In the decades that followed the Franco-Prussian War, further charges of anti-patriotic activity were regularly hurled at Renan and Zola by diverse factions in society. Right-wing politicians in France continued to call Renan patriotic because of what they interpreted as his racist beliefs. Charges against Zola of anti-patriotic activity levelled by the army and the French press were presented vehemently during the trial of Alfred Dreyfus. In the twentieth century, the right-wing in France continued, particularly during World War II, to accuse Zola of treason.

To evaluate the validity of such charges, this work will examine the 1870 wartime actions of both writers. It will seek to demonstrate that, despite their widely disparate backgrounds, neither Renan nor Zola was apathetic or treacherous. It will argue that neither man was unpatriotic, that both did their best to serve France in the way that each was best able, that each felt emotionally bound to his country and proved an able prophet of future French history.

Chapter One
Ernest Renan: Prophet in the Face of Patriotism

Renan's World: Influences from a Breton Childhood

Tréguier, where Ernest Renan was born in 1823, was an old monastic town in remote Brittany. Physically and spiritually his roots were there, but Renan really belonged to the nineteenth-century generation of thinkers and men of letters who came to maturity during the era of the 1848 revolution.

Renan was a Breton with all the qualities that inhabitants of the area are noted for. In modern literature Breton authors are distinguished by a common trait: dislike of frivolity and the need for an ideal.[1] Renan wrote of his own people: "O simple clan of farmers and seamen, to whom, in an extinguished land, I owe the strength to preserve my soul alive!"[2] The remark is characteristic: throughout his life Renan clung to the early ideals that he learned from local ecclesiastics in Brittany. The man conformed with the characteristics he described; all his life he was obsessed with the search for faith and the truth: sacred principles that were the cause of a great religious struggle that dominated his youth. His struggle to attain perfection in these twin ideals would dominate his actions in 1870, leading

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[1]Georg Brandes, Creative Spirits Of The Nineteenth-Century (New York: Thomas Crowell Publishers, 1923), 221.

[2]Ibid.

to charges that he was unpatriotic. To a certain extent, therefore, Renan's idealistic pursuit of truth would also be the source of his difficulties.

Renan's father, a poor sailor who had eked out a living as a fisherman, died in mysterious circumstances when the boy was five years old.[3] Renan owed his initial moral education to his mother from whom he inherited his strong religious feeling, but his primary education by local clerics instilled further moral responsibility in him. Their lessons about virtue and simple truth were fundamental in helping him develop his theories about duty and reason.

Growth of An Intellectual: The Search For Truth

In 1838 Monseigneur Dupanloup, then in charge of the Jesuit institution, Saint-Nicholas de Chardonnet, heard of Renan's brilliant academic performance and offered him a scholarship.[4] At Saint-Nicholas, Renan acquired knowledge, culture and sophistication. Scepticism and an acute awareness of his growing lack of spiritualism were the causes of a

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[3]Philibert Renan, father of Ernest Renan, was a grocer and sailor. He failed to return from a fishing trip off the coast of Saint-Malo in 1828. Days later his body was washed up on the shore and was identified by his wife from personal items found on the corpse. It was never established if his death was the result of suicide or an accident.

[4]Monseigneur Félix Dupanloup (1802-1878). One of the liberal leaders in the Church, he was later Bishop of Orléans. Renan never forgot his kindness to him when he was a student and maintained lifelong contact with him.

devastating "crisis of faith" a few years later.[5] In 1845, after a period of intellectual soul-searching, Renan formally rejected the life of a priest: He was, in his own words, "a Catholic who no longer believed in Catholicism."[6] To all intents and purposes an agnostic after 1845, he still retained a certain nostalgia for the Catholic Church.[7]

The Man of Letters: Development of A Career

Renan dedicated himself to the search for truth in the hope that he could find the certitude that had evaded him within the confines of the Church. He completed his dissertation in 1849 and was awarded the degree of Docteur-ès-lettres by the faculty of the Collège de France on 11 August 1852. Renan's intellectual development was strongly influenced by an admiration for Germany and German thinkers that became stronger as time passed. To his imagination, Germany represented the very antithesis of scholasticism that had been forced upon him during his Seminary years. It also provided an antidote for what he had come to regard as a vacuous French life style as well as what he considered the superficiality of

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[5]The term "crisis of faith" is used by Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography.

[6]Ernest Renan, Recollections of my Youth (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 276.

[7]Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 67.

French men of letters. In his Cahiers Renan writes of "a secret instinct, a love without acquaintance that bears me toward Germany to see if I may there find my form."[8] Although he had little experience of German literature, he was impressed with the works of Kant and Goethe. Their depth in comparison to the works of French writers particularly inspired him: "That imbecile Saint-Marc Girardin, the most nauseating creature I know...I rage against them all. Germany! Germany! Germany! Goethe, Herder, Kant."[9]

During the 1848 revolt, Renan's letters reflect his wish to see France take the lead in the new road to the betterment of humanity: "If I should see humanity in tatters and France dying, I should still say that the destinies of humanity are divine and that France will march in the vanguard for their accomplishment."[10] His patriotic attitude would mature between 1848 and 1870, coming to fruition during his personal crisis caused by the Franco-Prussian war. In 1848 Renan published his first book, Histoire des langues sémitiques, which was a brilliant success and for which he received the prestigious Prix Volney.[11] He also wrote L'avenir de la

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[8]Ernest Renan, Cahiers, 253, n. 66, quoted in Lewis Freeman Mott, Ernest Renan (New York: D. Appelton and Company 1921), 61.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., 74.

[11]Ernest Renan, Histoire des langues sémitiques in Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan, tome IX, Édition définitive établie par Henriette Psichari (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Éditeur, 1962).

Science, although it remained unpublished until two years before his death.[12]

In 1851, the year of Louis Napoleon's coup d'état, Renan was given the post of Attaché in the Imperial Library.[13] That year he was also introduced to the Revue des deux Mondes by Augustin Thierry.[14] 1852 saw the beginning of his collaboration with the Société Asiatique, on whose council he would remain until his death. He had by now established a reputation as a specialist in medieval literature.

In the years prior to the Franco-Prussian war, Renan's most famous work was his La vie de Jésus.[15] Published in 1863, the book quickly became the centre of controversy in France because of what many people saw as its heretic nature. In this work Jesus Christ is depicted as a mere mortal, a messianic figure living in a specific historical time period. It became immensely popular in France although it was scorned by the academic community and by the Church because of its

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Renan presented this work to the Institut in competition for the Prix Volney, an award offered by the Académies for a work in the domain of comparative philology. Its value was 1200 francs.

[12]Renan, Oeuvres complètes, tome III.

[13]Louis Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in a coup d'état on 2 December 1851. The Imperial Library was renamed the Bibliothèque Nationale.

[14]Augustin Thierry, French critic and writer (1795-1896). Renan's association with Revue des Deux Mondes as a contributor and critic would last throughout his life.

[15]Renan, Oeuvres complètes, tome IX.

human portrayal of Christ.[16] By the end of 1863, La vie de Jésus was a best-selling book that had been translated into several different European languages. The spectre of La vie de Jésus would haunt Renan throughout his academic career, leaving him open to charges of heresy and giving rise to later theories of his own messianic complex, a problem that may also have been responsible for his moralistic attitude and gloomy predictions for the future of France after 1870.

This work was followed by Renan's Questions contemporaines (1868) and Saint Paul (1869).[17] In 1862 Renan was appointed Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France but he was forced to resign his position after his inaugural lecture. He had inadvertently referred to Jesus Christ as "that incomparable man," thereby insulting many people in the academic community and incurring the wrath of the clerical party.[18]

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[16]Beirer, "Renan and his Interpreters," 381-383.

[17]Renan, Oeuvres complètes, tome II.

[18]Beirer, "Renan and his Interpreters," 381.

The Outbreak of War: Renan's Evolution From Germanophile To French Patriot.

When the Franco-Prussian war was declared in July 1870, Renan was abroad, travelling at sea with Prince Napoleon.[19] After a journey to Norway and Scotland, their yacht was cruising in northern waters when a telegram informed the Prince of the grave international situation.[20] Incredulous, they at first continued their journey, but additional messages announcing the outbreak of war forced their immediate return to Paris.

Arriving back in the capital on 22 July, Renan was given the job of making certain that National Archive documents were secure. Though fully occupied with his work, he still became increasingly agitated by the war reports. No one could have grieved more than he did at the terrible events, for he had long been the propagator of German culture in France.

Renan's own näivité was responsible for his shock at the news of war. It should not really have surprised him, for despite his unwillingness to get involved in worldly affairs,

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[19]Renan and Prince Napoleon, cousin of Emperor Napoleon III, who was known for his liberal political outlook, had been friends since 1865.

[20]Among the telegrams that Prince Napoleon received was one signed by Emperor Napoleon III that read "Guerre inévitable." Renan later wrote that after this message was received, he found the Prince on deck staring out to sea. The Prince told Renan, "Voila leur dernière folie, ils n'en feront pas d'autre." Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 29.

he had some interest in politics.[21] In the weeks preceding the war he lived in Paris and his liaison to the aristocracy could not have failed to make him aware of the tense international situation.[22] Nor could he claim ignorance about the Hohenzollern candidature to the Spanish throne that precipitated the actual declaration of hostilities. Whatever his shock and reaction in July 1870, the spectre of war had haunted him as early as 1868, when he wrote:

> Je crois à la guerre avant les élections; la situation de l'Europe me parâit chargée au plus haut dégré. Le traité avec la Belgique et la Hollande sera l'occasion qui fera tout éclater. Ce traité est un projet fort sérieusement engagé, quoi qu'on en dise. On croit de plus en plus à la guerre quoique les traités belgo-hollandaise paraissent écartés.[23]

If Renan had further misgivings about a future conflict he kept them to himself, but his dedication to Saint Paul contained the following lines:

> Quelques erreurs énormes entraînent notre pays à

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[21]In 1868 Renan had stood unsuccessfully for election as deputy.

[22]Renan frequently attended Salons organized by Princess Mathilde and Princess Julie Bonaparte, the sisters of Prince Napoleon. On these occasions he met other members of the aristocracy and government as well as academic colleagues and other French intellectuals. Ernest Renan, Correspondance 1847-1890, vol. II, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Éditeurs, 1929), letters to Princess Mathilde and Princess Julie Bonaparte, 1868-1870.

[23]Ernest Renan, unedited letter to his wife, 2 July 1868, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 19. Renan married Cornélie Scheffer, the niece of painter Ary Scheffer in 1856. In 1870 they had two small children who were in Brittany when the war broke out. Renan summoned them back to Paris.

l'abîme, ceux à qui on les signale sourient...[24]

A providential warning to France, perhaps, but emotionally Renan himself was totally unprepared for the disaster that followed.

One reason for Renan's disbelief was his incapacity to understand the nature of warfare. A pacifist and philosopher who viewed war as barbaric, he could not comprehend physical violence. A totally non-agressive man, he was shaken by the bellicose, warmongering scenes that he saw. For several days he walked around as if trapped in a nightmare.

The new image of Germary as the enemy was completely foreign to Renan, who had always seen Germany as his intellectual and foster mother: "Germany was my mistress," he had previously written.[25] It was a relationship that existed on intellectual rather than on personal terms, for his own contact with Germans was minimal. He seems not to have had much regard for Germans personally, yet he was a devoted admirer of German philosophy, culture, refinement and scientific progress.[26] Considering himself more an internationalist than a champion of French patriotism, Renan had

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ernest Renan, "La Guerre Franco-Allemande," Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 September 1870, quoted in Émile Buré, Ernest Renan et l'Allemagne (New York: Brentano's, 1945), 42.

[26]Renan had only been in Germany once, briefly, when he met his sister, Henriette Renan, at the railroad station in Berlin in 1850. Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 114 and Brandes, Creative Spirits of The Nineteenth-Century, 219.

strongly supported the concept of a united Europe led by an alliance of Germany, England and France. His profound faith in a future union that would work together for the common good of mankind had been almost an obsession. He cherished the vision of a "United States of Europe."[27]

As an early advocate of German unification, he had proposed an entente between German and French savants that would provide common understanding for a united Europe. When he learned that many German intellectuals, swayed by the ideals of the new militaristic Germany, had willingly sacrificed their principles to enlist in the German army, his depression knew no bounds.

Renan suffered a heavy blow, for his life's work was suddenly destroyed. All his sacred beliefs, trusts and deepest feelings were violated, leaving him but a shadow of his former self. He was betrayed, not only by his own government, but by German leaders and by the intellectuals of that country. Spent, devoid of feeling and hapless, he felt that the world had gone crazy. A sad letter to his wife written at the beginning of the war said that had he been successfully elected as a deputy in 1867, his fellow members would have had

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[27]Mme. James Darmesteter, The Life of Ernest Renan, translated by Mary Glasgow (London: Methuen and Co., 1897), 187.

to drag him from the Assembly in order to prevent him from speaking the truth.[28]

A further reason for Renan's incredulity was that he had taken for granted the strength and discipline of the French armed forces. He did not immediately recognize the false trappings that surrounded the French army, the poor discipline of the troops and the lack of leadership. Unaware of the instability of the Second Empire regime, he failed to realize that it lacked public support. Moreover, he had only passive knowledge of the new working class and little awareness of the real, growing menace of revolution.

Severely shaken by a crisis that he felt rivalled the one of his youth, Renan bitterly resented the war situation. Circumstances forced him, eventually, to accept that his beloved Germany was nothing but a romantic dream that existed only within his own mind. Renan mourned the loss of his idol, wanting desperately to believe that truth and idealism would triumph over sordid reality but events proved clearly that it did not.

Renan's evolution from Germanophile to active French patriot occurred gradually. First, he had to experience daily life in a country suddenly at war in order to understand the situation. His world had been rudely violated, so if he required some time to internalize this, he could be forgiven

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[28]Ernest Renan, unedited letter to his wife, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 19.

his over-wrought emotional state. A man who had idealized the country that now menaced his own could not immediately change the habits of a lifetime. Initially, Renan was unable to relinquish his long cherished beliefs, but he finally rationalized the situation by referring to Prussia as an aberration, a warlike and militaristic Germany that was totally the opposite of the rest of German culture. He certainly never relinquished his hope that the ideals of Goethe would overcome Prussian militarism. "Prussia will pass," he wrote, "Germany will remain."[29]

From incredulity and disbelief, his emotions finally gave way to pent-up frustration and anger. Later, in 1871 he wrote of his initial reaction:

> The aim of my life was to work for the intellectual and political union of Germany and France. And now the criminal folly of the fallen government, the exaggerated patriotism of Germany and Prussian arrogance have divided France and Germany by a chasm which it will take centuries to fill.[30]

Weakened by his strained emotional state, Renan still had to deal with the practicalities of daily life. Street scenes had a riveting effect upon him, for Paris was charged with patriotic fervor and over-confidence as French troops marched gaily off to the eastern front. Public support was largely in favor of the war, and it was widely felt that France was assured of an easy victory. Shouts of "A Berlin" were heard

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[29]Ernest Renan, letter to David Strauss, 15 September 1870, in La Réforme intellectuelle et morale, 102.

[30]Ibid., 113.

frequently on the Paris boulevards, while similar war cries were echoed in the French press. But the crowds in the streets who eagerly sang "La Marseillaise," waved French flags and embraced each other enthusiastically in emotional scenes were only visible for a few days. Within a week of the declaration, news of heavy French casualties began to filter back to Paris. As Prussian victories with huge French losses permeated the public consciousness, the atmosphere in Paris quickly changed from one of lightness to that of depression. "Paris morne," wrote Renan; a simple statement that echoed the depths of his own personal feelings, while reflecting those of the larger arena around him. Renan's actions and spontaneous outbursts surprised many people who had known him before the war. Edmond Goncourt recalled being present in a room with him when noise from outside suddenly drew their attention to the window overlooking the street below: "On se met à la fênetre attiré par les acclamations de la foule sur la passage de régiment qui passe. Renan s'en retire vite avec un mouvement de mépris."[31]

The Danish critic, Georg Brandes, met him on a Paris street at about the same time and his description of Renan's overwrought emotional state echoes that of Goncourt:

> Jamais, s'écrie-t-il en lui agrippant les mains et dans un état d'émotion extrême, jamais un peuple mal heureux n'a été gouverné par une telle collection d'imbéciles...

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[31]Edmond de Goncourt, Journal quoted in Jules Chaix-Ruy, Ernest Renan, 323.

> Et pensez que tout ce que nous autres savant nous nous sommes efforcés de créer par un demi-siecle d'efforts les sympathies de nation à nation...[32]

On August 19 Renan wrote an emotional letter to Grant Duff exclaiming: "What an access of insanity! What a crime! The greatest heart-pain I have ever felt in my life was when at Tromsöe we received the fatal telegram informing us that war was certain and would be immediate."[33] Several days later his shock gave way to anger. Upon hearing a crowd react enthusiastically to a passing group of soldiers he said contemptuously, "Not a man there is capable of an act of virtue."[34] These are not the words of a man who was indifferent about the fate of his country, for they clearly show Renan's distress at the predicament. Many other French citizens either left the country or refused to get involved in the situation, but Renan remained in France: his stand was far more patriotic than those who departed.

That a nation as civilized as Germany could behave in such primitive fashion was a severe disappointment for Renan, who never really accepted it: "Renan wept her [France] defeat in terms of blood, for she had suffered it at the hands of his

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[32]Georg Brandes (1847-1927) was a critic and author. Brandes, Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth-Century, 218.

[33]Ernest Renan, letter to Grant Duff, 19 August 1870 in Grant Duff, Memoir, 81, cited in Mott, Ernest Renan, 282. Grant Duff was a British critic and man of letters.

[34]Renan, 23 August 1870, quoted in Mott, Ernest Renan, 283.

ideal."[35] His previous good will toward Emperor Napoléon III now turned to contempt; Renan blamed him for leading France into disaster. It was a dual betrayal for Renan: that of his own country as well as that of his beloved idol, Germany.

The Role of a Patriot: Renan under Fire

What was left for Renan in the summer of 1870 when crushing defeat lay all around him? His emotions went the full spectrum: from anger and hysterical outbursts to a controlled plan that was carefully designed and thought out as a plausible solution to the troubles of France.

Renan quickly realized that his personal service would have to be in terms of intellectual combat, rather than physical service in the armed forces. This decision is fully in keeping with his self-image as an intellectual aristocrat. His attitude that reason and learning make demands upon the individual requiring sacrifice and effort above those of ordinary men gives credence to this. His patriotism, however, would be no less valid than if he had been able to make the supreme sacrifice in the service of his country.

Naïvely, Renan firmly believed that his personal intervention with other intellectuals could change the war situation. His self-delusion that his international reputation would help to salvage peace is indicative of his lack of

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[35]Ibid., 187.

realism and distraught emotional state at the time. It pointedly demonstrates Renan's lack of political acumen; a self-appointed defender of human intellectual rights, he thought that he could solve a highly complex political and diplomatic crisis.

A few days after the defeat, Renan attended one of the celebrated Magny dinners at Brébant's restaurant in Paris.[36] The self-appointed secretary of these meetings was Edmond Goncourt, who recorded the table conversation in his Journal.[37] "L'affaire Goncourt," as the incident became known in later years, refers to a dispute at the [Brebant] dinner over controversial statements attributed to Renan.[38] Goncourt asserted that Renan had excitedly debated the role of France in the war, attributing high praise to Germany for her great moral superiority and culture. Such a statement is not inconsistent with Renan's attitude, for he considered Germany

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[36]The Magny dinners were so called because they had been previously held at Magny's restaurant on the Left Bank in Paris. These dinners were attended by leading French intellectuals including Taine, Renan, and Flaubert. The gathering of French intellectuals had been initiated in 1862 by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869). After his death they were held at Brébant's restaurant. Robert Baldick, Les Diners Magny, translated from the French by the author (Paris: Éditions Denöel, 1972), 11-17.

[37]Edmond de Goncourt, Paris Under Siege: From The Goncourt Journal 1870-1871, ed., George Becker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 54-58.

[38]Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 1870, for a discussion of Renan's relationship with Edmond de Goncourt. Goncourt's version of the incident was not published until 1890. Although Renan contested what Goncourt said in the 1890 edition, he chose to publish his rebuttal in an obscure Breton newspaper.

and German culture the best in the world. Thus his feeling that the war between the two countries constituted the greatest misfortune that could befall humanity. When a suggestion was put forth that Frenchmen should raise their children with the idea of a future "revanche," Renan, in Goncourt's words, jumped to his feet exclaiming, "Non! Non! Périsse la France, périsse la patrie!"[39] This scandalous statement was greeted with extreme consternation by his peers, who rose from the table, shouting that "our country comes first!"[40]

Accuracy in recording dinner conversation is difficult to achieve under any circumstances. Noise interference, surrounding conversations and general activity associated with a meal make it difficult for individuals to hear correctly, often resulting in misunderstandings or misinterpretation of conversations. Edmond Goncourt was not always a reliable source when it came to reporting conversations.[41] Moreover, Goncourt disliked Renan; his Journal contains many bitter and sarcastic anecdotes about him.[42] Renan's outburst by itself would not have made Goncourt turn against him, but Renan had

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., 200.

[42]Edmond de Goncourt, Journal, 178-180, 200, 233 passim.

received favors from the regime of Napoléon III, whereas Goncourt had not.[43] This being the case, a jealous Edmond Goncourt may have deliberately assigned statements to Renan to make him appear to be a traitor during a time of national crisis.

In 1890, after publication of the new edition of Goncourt's Journal that contained the remarks in question, Renan denied them. For some unknown reason, he chose to place his denial in an obscure Breton newspaper.[44] He was far more concerned that Goncourt had misinterpreted his ideas, rather than that he had played with his words. In the habit of always taking pencilled notes, wherever he happened to be, Renan did so the night of the dinner at Brébant's restaurant. These "brouillons" include comments about the antipathy that he encountered after his debate with his colleagues that night:

> ..des ésprits amollis par la littérature...[45]
>
> Qu'est ce qu'une erreur de plus ou de moins? Un homme ne fait pas la verité..[46]

If Renan actually made the statements that Goncourt said he had, did the diarist really understand them? Truth was a fundamental priority for Renan; he was involved with a greater

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[43]Georg Brandes makes the comment that Goncourt wrote down other people's conversations but "never said a word or raised a finger" to help the cause of French patriotism. Brandes, Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth-Century, 225.

[44]Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 193-220.

[45]Ibid., 218

[46]Ibid.

kingdom than those that existed on earth: his concern was with the kingdom of Heaven and eternal judgement. There were, in effect, more important battles to be fought and won than military conflicts. In his conception of truth and duty there could hardly be room for the idea of "revanche." It would have been unthinkable for Renan that civilized men could raise their children to believe in a future "rendering of accounts." A concept so clearly alien to his own values and the work that he had devoted his life to would hardly have been well-received.

Goncourt's account claimed that Renan, clearly agitated, jumped to his feet, and began shouting, while at the same time waving his arms and becoming red in the face.[47] Such a description hardly fits that of a traitor. Desperation on the part of a frustrated individual, who unwillingly had been forced to see his most cherished ideals destroyed, is a more likely reason for such an outburst. It was not uncharacteristic of Renan, who had given meaning to such statements by claiming himself to be "one of those whom a philosophic conception of life has raised, not indeed above patriotism, but above the errors into which one is drawn by an unenlightened patriotism."[48]

Neither is Renan's statement, "Périsse la France," at all inconsistent with his views of morality and his attitude

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[47]Goncourt, Journal, 55-58.

[48]Mott, Ernest Renan, 283.

toward war, yet the notion that he wanted to see France overrun by the Prussians is absurd. Far from being unpatriotic, his remarks are a passionate outburst of emotion over broken ideals, a principle that does not contradict the most ardent love of country. If viewed as a philosophic statement made by a scholar who was an intellectual aristocrat, then it is fully comprehensible.

Renan's continued presence in Paris with his family throughout the war and for the first part of the siege in 1871 testifies to the responsibility that he felt toward France. Although he was urged by his friends to leave, he refused the opportunity to seek exile in England. "Nous ne pouvons quitter la France que si elle nous chasse," he wrote.[49] He would not desert his country during her time of trial, and, unable to serve in any other fashion, Renan initiated several valiant intellectual, if impractical, attempts to prevent the humiliation and dismemberment of France. All of his actions over the next few months attest to his patriotism, his desperate soul-searching and the depths of his personal despair.

On 15 September 1870 Renan published an article entitled, "La guerre entre France et L'Allemagne" in the Revue des Deux Mondes.[50] Probably written prior to the outbreak of

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[49]Ernest Renan, letter to Marcellin Berthelot, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 104.

[50]Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 September 1870.

hostilities, it contained liberal and internationalist viewpoints. In calm, rational fashion, Renan argued that "the intellectual, moral and political harmony is broken," between the two countries and that hate would henceforth take the place of understanding. A Germanophile still, Renan viewed France as the aggressor in the clash with Germany. He did not, however, think that Prussia was entirely correct either, and he criticized the Germans for being harsh and arrogant. At the same time he denounced France as superficial and presumptuous. In his view, if France had treated Germany liberally, then the latter would be positive in her actions toward France.

Renan's opinion was motivated not by lack of patriotism but by the perception of a nationalist attitude in France that was too far removed from his concepts of duty and truth. He had long objected to superficiality, considering French values and bourgeois lifestyle under the Second Empire lacking in morality. His Breton background and religious training both emphasized that life demanded sacrifices. If France were to reject bourgeois attitudes in favor of a more moral and more principled way of life, then, Renan felt, the country's eternal salvation was assured. To ensure that this would happen, France must follow the example of Germany, the very force that was threatening her.

No doubt it would be a painful apprenticeship for France, but Renan had long felt that German protestant work ethic and strict lifestyle had made Prussia into the vibrant force that

it was. He admired organization and discipline, two things that Prussia had and both of which he thought that France lacked. Consequently, if France were to adapt to a more serious lifestyle, Renan wrote, the political affairs of Europe would revert to their natural state. Prussia must agree to return the two French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, and a League of Neutrals should be set up that would work toward the establishment of a federal pact. In effect, a contract of this sort would mean the end of diverse nationalities that would be replaced instead by a united Europe. So popular was this idea with an influential sector of government and public opinion that Adolphe Thiers made a diplomatic tour to various European capitals where he met European leaders to set up a peacekeeping League.[51]

Renan naturally assumed that his advice would be respectfully listened to. To his surprise, his views, while well-received by some people were far from popular with the majority in France that genuinely believed in the country's ability to easily win the war. Mistakenly, he was trying to apply moralistic attitudes as a solution to a sophisticated diplomatic problem.

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[51]Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877). He was the first president of the Third Republic. Renan, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, introduction, xix.

He had long admired the work of the German philosopher David Friedrich Strauss.[52] To Strauss's French translator Renan confided: "He is, I think, the man of this century for whom I have the greatest admiration and sympathy."[53] Renan and Strauss had exchanged letters prior to 1870, but a planned meeting for that year had been interrupted by the deteriorating international situation. Before war broke out in July, Renan had already agreed to write the preface for Strauss's new book on Voltaire that was to be published in France.[54] Renan was quick to accept this honour: "Nous nous aiderez à nous mettre [Strauss] de ma part, en attendant, qu'il n'a pas au monde un admirateur plus sympathique que moi."[55] Strauss had sent a copy of the book to Renan, who replied with a congratulatory letter and expressed his regret at the international state of affairs.

In an open letter published in the Gazette d'Augsbourg on 18 August 1870, Strauss wrote a commentary on the war in which he reviewed the historical causes that had led to German unification and discussed the steps that had resulted in the

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[52]David Friedrich Strauss, (1808-1874), German philosopher, historian and writer.

[53]Ernest Renan, letter to Charles Ritter, 3 September 1869, quoted in Mott, Ernest Renan, 286. Charles Ritter (1838-1908) was a Swiss theologian and writer who translated the works of David Strauss.

[54]Through the good offices of Charles Ritter.

[55]Ernest Renan, letter to Charles Ritter, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 44.

outbreak of hostilities. At the end of his article, he invited Renan, through the medium of the press, to join him in a discussion of the causes and significances of the war.[56] Thus Renan was put in the position of literary protagonist of the French nation before the world.

Encouraged by what he perceived as Strauss's sympathetic analysis of the situation, Renan wrote an open letter to him that appeared in the French press on 13 September 1870.[57] Addressing Strauss respectfully as "learned master," Renan called for a scholarly, intellectual debate from a philosophical point of view. Defending his actions as those of a lifelong admirer of German culture and civilization, he presented a reasoned argument that called for Prussian moderation toward France while still recognizing the need for German unification. After an examination of all the reasons for the war, Renan concluded by urging Strauss to assess all the philosophical points involved. In particular, Renan urged that the Prussians return Alsace and Lorraine to France, citing this as necessary "to the harmony of the world."[58] France could not exist in a dismembered state; the country risked annihilation unless the eastern provinces were

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[56]David Strauss, open letter to Ernest Renan, 18 August 1870, cited in Renan, "Lettre à David Strauss," 13 September 1870, in La réforme intellectuelle et morale, 110.

[57]Ernest Renan, "Lettre à David Strauss," 13 September 1870, Journal des Débats, in ibid., 105-106.

[58]Renan, letter to David Strauss, 15 September 1870, in La réforme intellectuelle et morale, 97.

returned. If France ceased to exist, he reasoned, then Europe could hardly continue without it. Renan concluded his letter by reminding Strauss of the all-important "kingdom of Heaven, a world superior to hatred, jealousy and pride."[59]

It was a fine piece of practical logic, one that recognized Renan's "duty and reason" outlook on life, while attempting to resolve the problems of the war on an intellectual level. Its tone was pacifist: "La France est profondément pacifique; ses préoccupations sont tournées vers l'exploitation des énormes sources de richesses qu'elle possède et vers les questions démocratiques et sociales."[60] Stating that it was up to the French nation to determine whether France would go on to a war of revenge or join an alliance with Germany and England, Renan then called for a Congress of the United States of Europe: "Le principe de la féderation européenne peut ainsi offrir une base de médiation semblable à celle que l'église offrait au moyen âge."[61]

Characteristically, Renan felt relaxed about writing to Strauss even when their countries were enemies. Judging history to far outweigh the importance of practical and political considerations caused by war, he was confident that Strauss would accept his gesture in the spirit of intellectual

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[59]Ibid., 105-116.

[60]Ernest Renan, Lettre à M. Strauss, 13 September 1870, in ibid., 110.

[61]Ibid., 114.

goodwill. Not stopping to consider possible reprecussions, Renan naturally assumed that his German confrere shared his pacifist views. He was confident that all problems of a political nature could be resolved by philosophic debate.

Strauss's reply came as a rude shock to Renan, for it contained a strongly nationalist point of view that attributed blame to France. In the Prussian offensive Strauss saw justice that was punishment for years of French arrogance and decadence. In the new state, Prussia would provide necessary military force, while South Germany gave it flesh and blood.[62] The German philosopher, confident of Prussian military victory, ridiculed Renan's suggestion of returning the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Furthermore, he took advantage of a minor error in Renan's letter to suggest that the French intention was really to annex the Rhineland provinces of Sarrelouis and Landau. Here, he added, was further indication of French arrogance and military aggression. Strauss refused to print Renan's original letter in the German press, although he published all three communications in a pamphlet later and donated the proceeds to the German war wounded.[63] His final boastful statements contained the lines: "If you had spoken so to your French

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[62]David Friedrich Strauss, open letter to Ernest Renan, 29 September 1870, quoted in Mott, Ernest Renan, 285.

[63]Strauss would not grant Renan this courtesy, although Renan had printed Strauss's initial letter in the French press.

people, O Ernest Renan, and converted them to your peaceful beliefs, our soldiers would not soon be drinking choice French wines in Paris."[64]

Renan was angered and deeply hurt by what he considered a moral deception. This "betrayal," perpetuated by a fellow intellectual, was one that he could neither rationalize nor forgive. He particularly resented Strauss's allegations that France's real intention was to annex the Rhineland provinces: "Je suis fâché, d'avoir été chargé devant l'Allemagne d'une telle absurdité par une autorité comme celle de M. Strauss."[65]

Several weeks passed before Renan saw the brochure that Strauss had sold to benefit the German war disabled. Barely able to conceal his fury, he wrote:

> C'est une des faiblesses qui nous font le plus de tort, à nous autres Français de la vieille école, de faire passer avant tout les délicatesses de gallant homme, avant tout devoir, avant toute passion, avant toute croyance, avant la religion, avant la patrie...Notre politesse, notre courtoisie n'étant pas payées de retour par des adversaires moins généreux, deviennent duperie.[66]

Renan's second letter to Strauss reiterated the story of their correspondence before continuing: "Notre politique, c'est la politique du droit des nations; la vôtre, c'est la

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[64]Strauss, letter to Renan, 29 September 1870, quoted in Mott, Ernest Renan, 285.

[65]Ernest Renan, letter to Charles Ritter, 11 Mar 1871, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 47.

[66]Ernest Renan, Letter to Charles Ritter, 29 April 1871, quoted in Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 47.

politique des races: nous croyons que la nôtre vaut mieux."[67] It was a pointed comment that would be prophetic for both countries in the years ahead. Strauss was carried away by a frenzied patriotism in the wake of Prussian victory, but Renan's reaction was that his own hardships endured during the war and after it served to further remind him of his commitment to the basic teachings of Jesus Christ:

> L'oeuvre à laquelle vous m'avez fait contribuer est d'ailleurs une oeuvre d'humanité, et, si ma chétive prose a pu procurer quelques cigares a ceux qui ont pillé ma petite maison de Sèvres, je vous remercie de m'avoir fourni l'occasion de conformer ma conduite à quelques-uns des préceptes de Jesus que je crois les plus authentiques.[68]

In spite of their recriminations against Strauss and Germany, the two letters did little to enhance Renan's public image in France. He was considered "a bad Frenchman," especially after his statements that the French must bear responsiblity for the war.[69]

The second letter to Strauss was not printed until November 1871, by which time Renan had developed some hindsight. He had, by then, lived through the war, the Siege of Paris, and the Commune. Initially he had believed that Prussia was "more sinned against than sinning," but his own

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[67]Renan, "Nouvelle Lettre à M. Strauss,"in La réforme intellectuelle et morale, 133.

[68]Ibid., 119. Renan's home in Sèvres had been sacked by the Prussians.

[69]Attacks on Renan in the French press increased after publication of his correspondence with Strauss.

lived experience had made him realize that Strauss was neither philosopher nor "un galant hommme." Having failed in his attempt to conclude a pact with a fellow intellectual that, in his view, might have produced beneficial results for mankind, Renan embarked upon another project. He decided to contact German Crown Prince Frederick, the General of the victorious German army that had defeated France and was responsible for the capitulation of Paris.[70]

Renan had met Crown Prince Frederick and his wife, Crown Princess Victoria, in Paris in 1867. The Crown Princess, who admire. Renan, had read several of his books including the controversial La vie de Jésus.[71] Their meeting, arranged at her request, had marked the beginning of a friendship between the German royal couple and Renan. The relationship between the Crown Princess and Renan had continued through correspondence and Renan was now willing to use it to try to end the war.

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[70]Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 71-102, for reaction to Renan's correspondence with the Prussian Crown Prince and Princess.

[71]Crown Princess Frederick, later Empress of Germany (1840-1901). Princess Victoria, Princess Royal of England, was the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria. She married Crown Prince Frederick in 1858. Although she was intelligent and well-educated, she was ostracized at the Berlin court and by the German Royal family because of her foreign birth. Members of the court thought she was sending sensitive information about Germany to her mother Queen Victoria. Ladislas Farago and Andrew Sinclair, Royal Web (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 185-186.

In October 1870 he boldly requested permission to cross Prussian enemy lines to meet with Crown Prince Frederick. When this was refused, he wrote directly to the Crown Prince declaring his negative feelings about the war and asking that Paris not be destroyed.[72] His letter, which eventually reached the Prince, brought a courteous refusal. Blaming the French for the war, the Crown Prince wrote that events had gone too far for any meeting or for a withdrawal. As the matter had already been discussed in the press with a leading German intellectual of the day, the Crown Prince did not see the need for an interview.[73]

Depressed but undaunted by the reply, Renan determined to continue in his efforts at mediation. Without considering the international and diplomatic repercussions of wartime correspondence with the enemy, he wrote to the Crown Princess in Berlin. In an eloquent letter that stated frankly his concerns about peace, the future of mankind and European civilization, he pleaded for the return of the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, the loss of which he feared

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[72]Renan had the concurrence of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government of National Defence, Jules Favre. Renan wrote to Crown Prince Frederick, who was at Versailles where he was planning the invasion of Paris, in October 1870. Renan, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, introduction, xix.

[73]The Crown Prince was referring to Renan's correspondence with Strauss that had been given wide publicity in the German press. Unedited letter from Crown Prince Frederick to Ernest Renan, 1 November 1870, quoted in Pschiari, Renan et La Guerre de 70, 69.

would be the underlying cause of future wars: "Les provinces détachées, loin d'être un rempart de paix, seraient une cause perpétuelle de guerre. Il ne faut pas croire que l'on pourrait se les concilier, ni que la France pût oublier une telle mutilation."[74] Princess Victoria had a reputation as a liberal thinker, but she had changed since her meeting with Renan. Now much more Prussian in personality and outlook than previously, she was caught up in the joy of Prussian victory in much the same way as David Strauss.[75] Her civil response to Renan agreed that war was terrible in its toll of human life, but noted that she personally could do nothing to help. Her position at the German court completely negated any influence she might have.[76]

Had Renan been more aware of the diplomatic implications, or had he considered the public reaction, he might have terminated the correspondence at that time. To his credit he

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[74]Ernest Renan, letter to Crown Princess Victoria of Prussia, in introduction, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, xix

[75]Crown Princess Victoria was suspected of being a liberal by the conservative Prussian court and the German RoyalFamily. She was also on very bad terms with Bismarck, who took pains to organize a campaign against her. The Berlin press had raised suspicions that she was an atheist and heretic. She was thought to have strong influence over her husband, Crown Prince Frederick. Ladislas and Farago, Royal Web, 192.

[76]The Crown Prince and Princess had been given the titles of Imperial Highness after King Wilhelm I of Prussia became German Emperor at Versailles in 1871. It is possible that Victoria felt that her new position made it too dangerous for her to comply with Renan's wishes. Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 99.

was undeterred, but he severely underestimated the situation. A second letter to the Crown Princess urged the need for peace and intellectual accord. He wrote from the heart: "Un abime est creusé entre la France et l'Allemagne, des siècles ne le combleront pas."[77] There was no response from the Crown Princess, but when the French press learned that Renan had written to her, it severely criticized him in the newspapers for his actions. The resultant public outcry added to his growing negative reputation.

Having gained no satisfaction from his attempts to reconcile France and Germany, Renan was forced to recognize that his personal prestige was powerless in this situation. On 17 November 1870 he was reinstated as Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France. His re-appointment by a revolutionary government, while not making him any better disposed toward republicanism, did made him aware that the new state appeared dedicated to furthering the arts irrespective of its political considerations. He wrote three additional articles that were published in Journal des Débats in November 1870; they urged that elections be held to establish a temporary Assembly whether or not there was an armistice.

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[77]Ibid.

Renan's Plan For France: His Proposed Constitution

Renan's constitutional plan for postwar France called for an Assembly composed of an aristocratic elite. It was based on ideas originally expressed in his Essais de morale et de critique in 1859.[78] This earlier work had called for an aristocracy based on the intellectual elite instead of one based on traditional blood lines. Stating that that the clergy were the only true intellectuals in France, Renan wrote:

> We do not exaggerate to ourselves the part which thinkers should play in the conduct of human affairs; still we do not think the time has yet come when they should withdraw from public life, and abandon the concerns of this world to intrigue and violence. He who criticized the doings of his age without deigning to take part in them, is always open to censure, but he who has done what an honest man might, he who has spoken his thought, careless whom he might please or displease, he may have a conscience marvellously at ease. We do not owe it to our country to be false to the truth for her sake, or to be wanting for her sake in tact and good taste; we are not obliged to follow her in her caprices nor to become converts to the cause which succeeds; but we do owe it ot her to say exactly, and without a shadow of variation, what we believe to be the truth.[79]

Renan's preoccupation with the search for truth brought him to the conclusion that the only human beings capable of finding and telling the truth were the intellectuals; their own search for the hidden God made them worthy.

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[78]Renan, Oeuvres complètes, tome II.

[79]Ernest Renan, Constitutional Monarchy in France, trans. by the publishers (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1871), 7.

On 26 January 1871 an armistice that ordered France to pay an indemnity to Germany of three billion francs was declared.[80] Elections that were held on 8 February 1871 gave the government a mandate to end the war. Renan used this opportune timing to write yet another letter to Crown Princess Victoria on 15 February. Adopting a more aggressive tone, so that he would not be perceived as a supplicant requesting one final chance for France, he identified the errors that Prussia had made. Alluding briefly to his previous correspondence with the Crown Princess, Renan went on to chide Prussia for its lack of good sense. Particularly angry that no attention had been paid to his previous suggestions, he foresaw that Prussia's indifference to these matters would inevitably result in a future war of revenge by France.[81]

That Renan's own thinking had evolved since July 1870 is apparent in this final letter to the German Crown Princess. He wished to remind the Princess and the Prussians that they had allowed the opportunity for good judgement to slip away. Had they recognized the salient points of his suggestions: that Alsace and Lorraine be returned to France and that Europe revert to the pre-war boundaries, then, he felt, the future of Europe would be more secure. Instead, Renan foresaw the

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[80]Three billion francs was approximately 400 million dollars. Ladislas and Farago, Royal Web, 196.

[81]Setting up a League of Neutrals to intervene on behalf of the two countries, arbitration by such an organization and establishment of a neutral zone between the two countries.

continent thrown into jeopardy over the growing menace of Russia.

Renan's letter marked a complete reversal in attitude, for he now admitted that a future war of revenge was a possibility. He rationalized his contradictory attitude by stating that, since military revenge was contradictory to everything he believed in, he would henceforth never get involved in politics again.[82]

Renan was deeply depressed at the time, writing to his old friend Marcellin Berthelot: "Nous sommes tristes ici. Tout est morne et froid. Je pense bien, en effet, qu'on porte en ce moment à l'âme de la vieille France un coup mortel."[83] Deeply pessimistic about the future and unable to do anything more to help his country, he withdrew from public life to continue his lectures at the Collège de France.

In March 1871 Renan received a letter from the German historian, Theodor Mommsen.[84] A well-known francophobe, Mommsen felt vindicated after the German victory over France, yet he had no hesitation in requesting a resumption of academic communications between the Universities of Paris and

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[82]Renan met Crown Princess Victoria one more time when she visited Paris incognito in 1880. However, their correspondence resumed after the war and she continued to read and admire his works.

[83]Letter from Ernest Renan to Marcellin Berthelot, 26 February 1871, in Ernest Renan Correspondance 1847-1892, 395.

[84]Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903). German historian and writer.

Berlin.[85] Renan greeted his letter enthusiastically, readily agreeing to Mommsen's request. Once again, Renan ignored the reaction that his acceptance of Mommsen's offer would cause in the French press. Severely criticized for his easy acquiescence to Mommsen, Renan roused the ire of his academic colleagues who felt that he had given in to Mommsen too easily. Certainly he agreed unreservedly, but it was one more example of his lofty concern with higher claims of culture and civilization rather than with petty disputes.

When civil war broke out in Paris in March 1871, Renan, unlike many other intellectuals, still did not leave.[86] His decision to remain was patriotic, but he was also too involved in his own work to leave. He had, moreover, made negative comments about immigration that show how much Renan disliked the thought of uprooting himself: "Je hais l'immigration," he wrote in a letter to Berthelot.[87] In April, when the hazardous shelling of the city finally forced him out, he moved to his house in Sèvres with his family.

His reaction to those who left Paris was expressed at a dinner at Bébant's Restaurant the night after the outbreak of the civil war. Disgusted by what he termed a breach of duty,

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[85]Mommsen had referred to French culture during the war as being as "dirty as the waters of the Seine." Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 221-246.

[86]PP. 10-11 of this study for information on whereabouts of different French Intellectuals during war of 1870 and its aftermath.

[87]Psichari, Renan et la Guerre de 70, 104.

Renan complained about the lack of courage of the Paris deputies, who had fled the city for the security of Biarritz. Edmond Goncourt for once agreed with Renan: "Renan says, that if his fellow citizens had honoured him with their mandate he would not have failed in what he calls a duty."[88]

It was a remark completely in keeping with his character: to leave would be unpatriotic and a total rejection of what he deemed a patriot's duty. Unless they were driven out, those who had benefitted from the intellectual liberty that France had given them would be defrauding the country. Renan's strict moral code contributed to this position. His ongoing interest in Biblical doctrine and attempts to identify with the Biblical prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel, gave way to a vision: he saw himself as a martyr forced to remain in Paris to suffer his punishment.[89] His displeasure must have increased considerably when he was forced to move his lectures at the Collège de France from the left bank of the Seine to the right because of shelling in the Latin Quarter. In May 1871, the bombardment of the city intensified, finally forcing Renan to leave Sèvres with his family for refuge in Versailles. From there he commuted daily to Paris, once again occupying himself with the safekeeping of state documents.

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[88]Goncourt, Journal, 260. Renan had halfheartedly allowed his name to be put forward for deputy in the elections of 1870, but he had not been elected.

[89]Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 125.

The civil war and the Commune were the final catastrophe for Renan. After the calamities of the previous year, in the fires that consumed Paris in 1871 he recognized history repeating itself: Paris was Jerusalem burning in 70 A.D. In the pages of L'antéchrist he compared Bloody Week of 1871 with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.[90] Nothing shows his own personal agony more, for Renan could only surmise from this that the Apocalypse had finally happened. "What was most mournful in Paris, on the 25th of May 1871," he wrote, "was not the flames; it was the general color of the city, seen from an elevated point: a false yellow tone, a kind of dull pallor."[91] As he watched the fires from a vantage point at St. Cloud he said, "The poor wretches have been poisoned by three viruses, by crazy illusions, chimerical hopes fanned by Trochu [governor of Paris] and a crack-brained journalism."[92]

Using allegory to compare the situation in France with poetic and Biblical imagery, Renan visualized himself as Job in the Bible: humiliated, he would rise up out of the ashes. Germany was Jupiter, who punished France using harsh and proud Germanic virtue. Someday in the future France would revenge

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[90] Renan, Oeuvres complètes, tome IV.

[91] Cited in Richard Chadbourne, "Renan As Prophet of the European and World Future," The American Society of Legion of Honor Magazine XXII, (1951), 299.

[92] Ibid.

Jupiter by bestowing a calamitous defeat upon him in the same way that Germany had done to France.

For Renan, France in 1870 was in a mystical position. He saw the defeat in holy terms: an Almighty that rose up and punished a corrupt and morally rotten France. Nevertheless, the aggressor would be the one who would be punished by the divine will that would reinstate the righteous one in the end. If for Renan, 1789 was an apotheosis, then 1870 was the harvest of all the errors and wrong that had been done in the years since the Revolution. The difference for Renan was that in 1870 France had the unique opportunity to do penance to overcome the sin of liberalism. A new morality would then purge the country of the moral wrong that had befallen it.

"Bloody Week" in May 1871 was the lowest point for Renan who feared for his city, for his revered manuscripts and for his fellow citizens. Although he personally detested the leaders of the Commune, he was rational enough to be able to differentiate between leaders and followers. Clearly devastated by the disastrous state to which France had sunk, he did what he could to help those in trouble with the Commune; he personally saved several people from execution.[93] Emotionally exhausted and overcome with sorrow, he finally withdrew to his own home to write about the situation. He finished the first set of reflections, Dialogues

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[93]Including the former personal secretary of Saint-Beuve and Renan's own gardener, both of whom had been arrested.

Philosophiques, in May 1871, although it remained unpublished until 1876. This was followed by La réforme intellectuelle et morale, published in November 1871.

Intellectual Reflections: The Lessons of 1870-71

Renan wrote Dialogues Philosophiques while he was living in Versailles in 1871.[94] He had left his books and papers behind in the hasty departure from Paris, so he had none of his regular work with him. This enforced hiatus from his usual labors finally convinced him that he could best serve his country through his intellectual ability, and so he spent four weeks reviewing his fundamental philosophy.

Dialogues Philosophiques, a reflective but non-conclusive work, was a projection of Renan's own intellectual fantasies. In it, various philosophic problems are set forth without any definite solutions provided for them. The work is easily recognizable as an evolution of Renan's own thinking after the personal nightmare that he had endured during the war and in the miserable year that followed it.

Using imaginary participants, Renan set up three dialogues based on certitudes, problems and dreams. All three contain the theme of universal goodness that reflected Renan's own belief in the prevailing spirit of mankind. It is a theme

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[94]Renan lived in lodgings at Versailles for the month of May 1871 during which time he did not have the use of his library. It was then that he wrote Dialogues Philosophiques.

that supports Renan's own evolution. He had gone through many philosophies, by 1871, but rejected them all. In his heart he finally knew that universal goodness was the only law that does not deceive and that such goodness cannot be based upon intellectual theory.[95]

Dialogues Philosophiques contained the same fundamental ideas as L'avenir de la Science. Science, wrote Renan, would be the salvation of mankind. In an eerie, prophetic look into the future, Renan foresaw that a proposed elite of scientists and scholars would be able to control the masses by possession of a secret weapon: the capability of which could plunge them into insuperable difficulties: "not a chimerical hell, of whose existence we have no proof, but a real hell."[96] With his use of the phrase "secret weapon" he glanced prophetically into the future at nuclear power, a theme that he took up again in his later play, L'Eau de Jouvence.[97] The submission of the masses to absolute control by a political elite of aristocrats and intellectuals demonstrated Renan's real dislike of democracy.[98] Using science as the only salvation for mankind, he envisaged a situation of cold versus heat in

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[95]Mott, Ernest Renan, 297.

[96]In "Revers," the third dialogue of Dialogues Philosophiques, Renan has the main character, Théoctiste, speak these words.

[97]Ernest Renan, L'Eau Jouvence (Paris: Calmann-Lévy Frères, 1880).

[98]Chadbourne, "Renan As Prophet of the European And World Future," 301-302.

the world. He set the "cold chill of the democratic masses" in motion against the "heat and light" generated by the superior minds of the elites and aristocrats.[99] Energy, of course, won in the end and the elites were reinstated in their position of power against the republican hordes.

In La réforme intellectuelle et morale, on the other hand, Renan attacked contemporary French issues. Written in 1871, the work addressed moral and political questions and made radical proposals for the political reform of the country. Renan reconsidered some of the proposals after the more turbulent events had passed.

La réforme saw Renan abandon classic French liberalism in favor of a return to a quasi-feudal monarchy. By 1871 he had reached a watershed: he was forced to concede that his concept of an idealized Germany was false and to admit that a republican government really was dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge.

La réforme consisted of four articles developed into one and published under a single title.[100] When they were finished, Renan sent them to Berthelot and to Taine for commentary. To Berthelot he wrote that he realized the

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[99]Ibid., 308.

[100]The articles are, "La Guerre Entre La France et L'Allemgne," "Lettre à M. Strauss," "Nouvelle Lettre a M. Strauss," "La Part de la Famille et de L'État Dans L'Éducation."

remedies he proposed for the reform of France were impractical, if not impossible:

> Je viens de recevoir votre lettre, qui m'a été une grande consolation. Nous sommes fort tristes ici. Tout est morne et froid, et les plus atteints doivent être ceux qui, comme nous, voient combien le mal est profond. Je pense bien, en effet, qu'on porte en ce moment à l'âme de la vieille France un coup mortel. Je n'espère rien, car les remèdes que j'entrevois, je suis le premier à dire qu'ils sont impossibles, au moins pour le moment - même dans un avenir assez lointain.[101]

Taine agreed with Renan in essence about the work, for he commented:

> Renan has lent me four long political articles dealing with the situation, which he probably will not publish. They are loose, abstract, not very good. He is by no means at his best. He has always plenty of ideas, but his fundamental notion will repel; very clearly he is for the restoration of aristocracy, the better to follow the example of Prussia.[102]

Renan, therefore, was well aware of the poor chance that his work had of being accepted; that he still wanted it published is testimony to his patriotism. All previous attempts at a solution to the problems of France had failed, but he would still try one more time.

La réforme intellectuelle et morale is divided into two parts: "Le Mal" and "Les Remèdes." In part one Renan writes of the malady and the evils that had befallen France. "Le Mal"

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[101]Ernest Renan, letter to Marcellin Berthelot, 26 February 1871, in Ernest Renan, Correspondence 1847-1892, 395.

[102]Hippolyte Taine, Sa vie et correspondance quoted in Mott, Ernest Renan, 288.

deals with weak national morality, represented by the inefficiency of the French Catholic education system with its general contempt for learning and scientific knowledge. Renan believed that strong morals and a well-organized education system were absolutely necessary criteria for a modern state. Without them no nation could be militarily prepared. Lack of patriotism, the false sense of materialism that had prospered under the Second Empire and egalitarianism inherited from the liberal tradition of 1789 were responsible for the civic irresponsibility of 1871.

For Renan, an intellectual aristocrat, the war could only be blamed on the inculcation of false values that had been instilled in Frenchmen by the great revolution a century before. He feared that France risked becoming what he termed "a second-rate America" because of the revolutionary fever that was sweeping across Europe. From Renan's viewpoint, revolution and democracy were synonymous with barbarism and vulgarity. He equated commercialism, false values, freedom and democracy with America, all of which represented superficiality to him. Never could he imagine America emerging from her barbarous state to become a great power. France, he warned, was headed along a similar destructive path:

"Those who pursue so eagerly the American ideal forget that the American race has not our brilliant past... that it has never made a discovery, or created a masterpiece."[103] He

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[103]Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 125.

idealized France as "a perfect jewel," because of her aristocratic and cultured history. France was not vulgar like America or uncouth like Russia. Although France had reached perfection in former times, the country had been gripped by a general malaise that was a result of universal suffrage. Moral debasement, mediocrity, a desire for selfish pleasures and material comforts had resulted in growth of a bourgeois class whose members reacted poorly to discipline and were unfit for war. Lack of morals bred a poor patriotic attitude that left the army militarily unprepared, the country unprotected and the people indifferent to their own welfare.

In La réforme intellectuelle et morale, Renan saw the evils of France in a stern, moralistic way that demanded a redemption. He used the term "revanche," but it was not to be a "revanche" in the physical sense that would inflict hurt and pain upon millions of victims. He proposed a moral revenge that would have France assimilate the qualities of a superior nation, thus allowing her to re-emerge with renewed moral and intellectual strength gathered from the model.

In "Les Rèmedes," the second part of the book, Renan proposed a unique solution. France must take her moral example from the enemy, Prussia. Intertwined into this idea he wove science and progress, noting that Prussia had been in the same position as France when defeated at Jena in 1806. Strong work, discipline, protestant ethic and military re organization had resulted in the emergence of a strong nation. The twin ideals

of duty and military spirit had saved Prussia, bringing that country to its present might and glory. "Revanche," therefore became the suitable battle cry for Renan as he invoked the spiritual and moral renewal of France.

French patriotism demanded restoration of the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Had Germany not dismembered the nation, France might have led the way to a united Europe. Penance, Renan moralized, necessitates the correction of fundamental errors. Therefore France would have to do penance in order to overcome the situation wrought upon the country in 1870. The basic wrong was the country's acceptance of liberal tradition and superficial democracy that was the heritage of 1789.

Therefore the future would depend upon a strongly authoritarian, but still constitutional, monarchy. A King supported by an aristocracy, scientists, scholars and the army would have the best results for the country: "The most pressing interests of France, the character of her mind, her good qualities and her defects, make royalty a necessity to her."[104] An aristocracy was imperative because "France, excels only in the exquisite; she loves only what is elegant; she can only be aristocratic."[105] He wrote again to Berthelot: "Nous avons ainsi détruit les organes essentiels d'une société et nous nous étonnons que la société ne vive pas. La civilisation

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[104]Ibid., 81-82.

[105]Ibid.

a été de tous temps une oeuvre aristocratique, maintenue par un petit nombre; l'âme d'une nation est chose aristocratique aussi."[106]

The King would be supported by a strong nobility since duty in Renan's view is aristocratic and democracy with its lack of discipline and disorder cannot successfully make war. Renan offers a prophetic glance to a future "settling of accounts" between France and Germany.[107] "May the future prove me wrong," he wrote.[108] It is for this reason that he foresaw the need for a strong army.

The position of the Church and clergy in "Les Rèmedes" is ambiguous. Renan supported a system that would permit the clergy to act as a check upon the population, whereas the aristocracy would be left alone to consist of free-thinking, rationalist elites.

The "new order" that Renan advocated had strong ties with the Ancien Regime. Education would be in the hands of the clergy, but the universities would be under control of the Liberals, achieving autonomy and independence. Literary studies, which in Renan's view had been overemphasized, would have to acquiesce to science.

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[106]Renan, letter to Berthelot, 26 February 1871, in Ernest Renan, Correspondance, 395.

[107]Chadbourne, "Renan as Prophet of the European and World Future," 299-309.

[108]Renan, preface, La réforme intellectuelle et morale, 6.

He advocated the return of the Orléanist dynasty, not because he was in favor of the Orléans family, but in the interests of a return to stability. The Orléanists, he felt, had failed because the regime had not spoken to the French nation from the heart: "The Orléans dynasty in spite of its thorough uprightness and its rare honesty had not known how to speak to the heart of the nation, or to make itself loved."[109]

Renan's Final Patriotic Gesture

When La réforme intellectuelle et morale was finished, Renan left France for an extended stay in Italy in 1872. His conscience was clear about leaving because there was only one patriotic duty left for him carry out.

In 1872 he visited his old friend Prince Napoleon Bonaparte, who was then living in exile at his estate in Switzerland.[110] Renan travelled there to explain to him why he could not support a return of the Bonapartes in France.

By March 1872 the political situation in France had changed radically. The royalists were attempting a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy under the légitimiste pretender, the Comte de Chambord. Renan, remembering 1848, gloomily predicted

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[109]Renan, Constitutional Monarchy, 51.

[110]Prince Napoleon had been exiled from France by Thiers. He was living at his estate, Prangins, in Switzerland.

civil war.[111] A discussion with Berthelot in October 1872 helped to bring him back to present-day reality:

> Le retour de Bonaparte serait la seule chose qui pourrait nous livrer sans défense et nous faire abandonner aux ambitions de la Prusse. La cause juste finit toujours par vaincre. Or, contre une nouvelle attaque, nous aurions la justice et la force morale et materielle que l'on puise dans ce sentiment. Ce sont les conquêtes iniques du premier Napoléon et les prétentions iniques du troisième Napoléon qui ont soulevé les peuples contre nous.[112]

Berthelot, recognizing Renan's tendency to overrate Prince Napoleon's political opinions, warned Renan against what he termed the rise of "Caesarian spectres."[113] Renan respected his opinion, for he told the Prince that he could not support his bid for power in France. Instead, he encouraged Prince Napoleon to serve his country by writing his memoirs from his place of exile.

After 1872 Renan hoped for an Orléanist restoration that would be supported by the nation, particularly the aristocracy. He did not, however, take any further active part in politics. In 1875, when the Orléanist claimant to the French throne visited the Comte de Chambord in an attempt to unite the two royal houses, Renan's hope for an Orléanist return was defeated. He wrote Berthelot that he could not

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[111]By disaster Renan meant revolution.

[112]Letter from Marcellin Berthelot to Ernest Renan, 9 October 1872, in Correspondance 1847-1892, 429-430.

[113]Ibid.

support the future Henri V as his reign would be one of fanaticism and ineptitude.[114]

What the horrible years of 1870-1871 did for Renan was to sharpen his awareness of the dangers of the future. Democracy, the nationalistic tides sweeping Europe, political reform and the rise of the middle classes - all of these intensified his fears about the future. His personal anguish was played out in his works of the war years: Dialogues Philosophiques, La réforme intellectuelle et morale and L'antéchrist.

Renan was not, then, a traitor or unpatriotic. Naïve, unrealistic and impractical to a great extent, he refused to adapt to reality, limiting himself to a narrow path defined by moralism and book learning. Egocentric in his belief that his intellectual prestige and European-wide reputation could change the international situation, he was sadly mistaken. He was self-righteous and unstable, but his love for his country and his patriotic efforts on its behalf remained undiminished. In his heart he knew he loved France.

If Renan had, at times exhibited a sternly moralistic, reprimanding attitude toward his countrymen, it was because he felt that he had their welfare at heart. Seeing himself as an intellectual aristocrat, he felt that he had a moral responsibility and duty to point out the errors of French lifestyle. If this were in the cause of patriotism, stirred by

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[114]Ernest Renan, letter to Marcellin Berthelot, 26 August 1873, in ibid., 432-435.

the national humiliation of the time, it was a patriotism that lacked real warmth. Daniel Halévy wrote: "La réforme intellectuelle et morale est un livre imposant par la qualité et la tenue des pensées, mais ce n'est pas un livre persuasif. L'auteur est trop visiblement un clerc detaché des choses de ce monde et qui se tient quitte vis-à-vis de son pays pour quelques conseils donnés de haut."[115] Renan, however, was not insensitive to his country's needs, for he did whatever he could do to help. Thoroughly disillusioned after 1870, he began, from this point, to develop the "detached pessimism" that marked the last decades of his life. He remarked to Déroulède: "Jeune homme, La France se meurt, ne troublez pas son agonie."[116]

In two specific ways the war of 1870 was an important turning point in Renan's intellectual development: Germany revealed itself to him in a totally unexpected light, and a political regime that he regarded with little favor proved to have the merit of encouraging learning and the pursuit of knowledge in spite of its political orientation. In his Constitutional Monarchy In France he had condemned both the

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[115]Daniel Halévy, Histoire d'une historie (Paris: Grasset, 1939), cited in La réforme intellectuelle et morale, introduction, xviii. Daniel Halévy, (1872-1962) was a French author.

[116]Maurice Barrès, Mes Cahiers (Paris: Plon, 1930), vol. 2, 108, cited in Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 187. Paul Déroulède (1846-1914) was a right-wing deputy in the government.

Revolution of 1848 and the Coup d'État of 1851 as crimes.[117] However in the conclusion to the essay he had written:

> La France peut tout excepté être médiocre. Ce qu'elle souffre, en somme, elle le souffre pour avoir trop osé contre les dieux. Quels que soient les malheurs que l'avenir lui réserve, et dût le sort du Français, comme celui du Grec, du Juif, de l'Italien, exciter un jour la pitié du monde et presque son sourire, le monde n'oubliera point que, si la France est tombée dans cet abîme de misère, c'est pour avoir fait d'audacieuses expériences dont tous profitent, pour avoir aimé la justice jusqu'a la folie, pour avoir admis avec une généreuse imprudence la possibilité d'un idéal que les misères de l'humanité ne comportent pas.[118]

Renan himself never regretted his venture into the field of patriotism. Indeed, he saw it as a duty that he could not disregard, for he wrote: "After the re-establishment of order, I applied all my attention to the reforms that I consider the most urgent to save our country. I have therefore done what I could. We owe our country our sincerity; we are not obliged to resort to charlatanism to make it accept our services or our ideas."[119]

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[117]"Constitutional Monarchy in France" is one of the articles that is part of La réforme intellectuelle et morale.

[118]Renan Constitutional Monarchy in France, 185.

[119]Renan, preface, L'antéchrist, xlix, cited in Mott, Ernest Renan, 292.

Chapter Two
Émile Zola: Republican Patriot

When Émile Zola was born in Paris in 1840, his prospects for a carefree childhood appeared bright. In 1843, his Italian-born father, Francesco Zola, took his family to Aix-en-Provence where he had relatives. There, he hoped, employment would be more readily available. Shortly after, he died, leaving his devastated wife and their young son in severe financial straits.[1] Thus two factors can be recognized as paramount in Émile Zola's development: he was the son of a naturalized foreigner, and his childhood ended abruptly at the age of seven.

A Bohemian Life In Paris

In 1857 Zola's mother moved back to Paris where she asked an old friend of her husband to negotiate her son's admittance to the prestigious Lycée St. Louis. Zola dutifully attended for two years, but twice failed university entrance examinations. In 1860, his mother reluctantly agreed that he should end his formal education.

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[1]Francesco Zola, born in Venice in 1795, was a naturalized French citizen. He caught a chill when he was supervising a work team in the area around Marseille. He was taken to a hotel in Marseille where he died in late March 1847.

Zola, impecunious, lived in a poor working class area of Paris where his sole interest was to stare out his window at passersby.[2] This provided him with first-hand experience of poverty and bonded him forever to working-class society. Zola never forgot it, learning a compassion and sensitivity from his own experience. He emerged from his seclusion with the realization that he wanted to be a writer. A job at the publishing house, Hachette, provided Zola with easy access to other literary figures. Impressed with Taine and Michelet, he found Ernest Renan less admirable. The two men never got along, although Zola admitted that he liked some of Renan's work. Years later it was Renan who was chiefly responsible for keeping Zola out of the Académie Française.[3]

In 1863 when his old friend Paul Cézanne came to Paris, Zola was first introduced to the group of painters later known as 'Impressionists.' The renegade artists were dedicated to new modes of technique, using brilliant colours on canvases

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[2]Zola rented a room in the Rue St. Etienne des Monts in a building that housed a brothel downstairs.

[3]Zola, because of his repeated attempts to be admitted to the Académie Française, became the perennial candidate. Renan, who was elected president of the Académie in 1879, and most of the other Academicians flatly refused his candidature, voting against him every time. The members considered Zola a man of rude and violent manners and thus unacceptable for membership. The truth was that his contemporaries found Zola exhausting. Renan explained as much when he wrote in La Presse: "I am sorry to see a man of such great ability falling back on so-called local colour. I am no longer interested in Zola. He has nothing new to tell me." Ernest Renan, La Presse, quoted in Armand Lanoux, Zola, 183.

and themes of realism and nature while seeking to portray art more realistically. Paintings by the Impressionist group, regularly rejected by the Salons, were ridiculed while those of painters who belonged to the prestigious École des Beaux Arts were acclaimed. Zola heard much about this injustice at the Café Guerbois in the Place Pigalle, where he spent time with his new friends.[4] Immediately interested in this struggle for justice, he was attracted as much by the artistic nonconformity as by the art itself.

His support was indicative of the strong commitment that he felt to the underdog, an echo of his own lived experience in Paris. Politically inclined toward the left, he eagerly espoused the republican cause, putting his hopes in the desire for more equal opportunity in a democratic state. A man of principle, he was motivated by ideals of justice and truth. Thoroughly aroused by a case of injustice, Zola cast about for the opportunity to speak out. It soon manifested itself through a career in journalism.

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[4]Café Guerbois was the meeting place of the group of Impressionist artists during the 1860's. Their leader was Édouard Manet. The café is still in existence in the Place Pigalle at this writing although it is now a restaurant.

The Young Journalist: Zola Takes A Stand

In 1862 Zola, angered by the poor public response to Édouard Manet's work, wrote a complimentary review of it.[5] A provocative statement in this review provides a good self-assessment of his own character, one that would describe him well in the future:

> I have said: 'What I look for in a picture is the man, not the picture.' And again: 'Art is made up of two elements: nature, the fixed element, and man, the variable. For those who are true to nature, I give two cheers; I give three for those who are true to themselves'...
>
> I defended Manet, as I shall defend all my life every honest individuality under attack. I shall always be on the side of the vanquished. There is an obvious conflict between the unquenchable creative temperament and the crowd. I stand for the creative temperament and I attack the crowd.[6]

Clearly, his rebellious attempt to befriend the outcast did not just emerge in 1894 with the Dreyfus Affair. During the darkest days of the Franco-Prussian war, throughout the Commune, threatened by hate-mongers during the height of the

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[5]Manet, in return for Zola's support of his work, did a portrait of the writer. The portrait of Zola reveals nothing about him, but the background scenery tells a great deal about Manet. Displayed on the wall is Manet's controversial Olympia in company with Zola's work, Biographical and Critical Study of Manet. In short, the impression given is that the artist paid greater attention to the accessories than to the subject. Additional interest is generated because the painter himself appears to hold an influence over his subject.

[6]F.W.J. Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola, 58.

Dreyfus trial, Zola could not contain himself when he felt that the truth had to be spoken.

Zola was not really attracted by journalism, although he recognized its potential for earning income while making his name known to the reading public. He felt that the press as a whole was undignified and did not approve of journalists who dragged the character of the press into the mire. He frequently changed employers when his principles dictated that the policies of certain papers were improper. An idealist, he was disappointed when he was unable to change the ideas of a larger number of the literate French population. His objective was clear: "I should like to see a republic of superior men.. I should like to see the nation established scientifically on the solid basis of republican government, having determined its needs according to race, history and the contemporary milieu."[7]

Most newspapers and dailies printed in Paris in the 1860's supported the left-wing republican cause.[8] One such radical democratic paper was Le Rappel. As republican fervour grew in the months prior to the outbreak of war, Zola's position as correspondent on other papers of less extreme

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[7]Émile Zola, 28 July 1871, "Étude sur le journalisme. Melanges, Préfaces et Discours," 347, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 5.

[8]Ibid., 117.

political outlook became embarrassing to him.[9] Not wanting to appear a hypocrite, he limited his political articles to Le Rappel; his reviews were submitted to Le Gaulois.

By the end of 1869 Zola, far more radical than previously, had become deeply committed to the republican cause.[10] All his energies as a reporter were devoted to defaming the imperial regime. He detested the 'Men of December' for their illegal coup d'état as well as for the abominable state that he felt the country had fallen into.[11] He was of the opinion that France was "rotting at the centre":

> When a nation has sunk its feet into this mire, it slowly rots; the evil gnaws, progressing relentlessly right to the heart. It is high time that the Republic cuts out this infection if it does not want gangrene to set in.[12]

The intended canonization of Jeanne d'Arc provided Zola with the opportunity to take an anticlerical stand, and promote the cause of patriotism. On 15 May 1870, he published an article addressed to Monseigneur Dupanloup, entitled, "Une

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[9]La Tribune and Le Gaulois. Both papers were less radical in political outlook than Le Rappel.

[10]Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 5.

[11]'Men of December' was a reference to the circle of Napoleon III supporters who had engineered the coup d'état on 2 December 1851.

[12]Ibid., 19 July 1871, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 5.

Nouvelle Sainte." It portrayed Jeanne as a popular heroine, who rightly belonged to the French people, not the Church:

> Jeanne d'Arc était à la France: ces messieurs veulent la donner à l'Église...Le troupeau catholique a une idole de plus...
>
> Elle est le Peuple aussi. C'est là ce qui la dresse debout au-dessus des âges. Elle est le Peuple se levant d'indignation, d'un coin de la patrie avilie, et se ruant à la défense du sol, quand les armées des rois n'ont plus de sang ni de courage. Elle est la Patrie éternellement jeune trouvant des femmes pour le défendre, le jour où les hommes manquent. C'est une fille des jacques, cette héroïne qui travailla à remettre la couronne sur le front d'un prince; elle sauva la France, elle aurait sauvé la liberté, si l'heure de la liberté avait sonné. L'histoire voit en elle une des plus hautes personnifications d'un peuple et d'un siècle: la religion n'y peut voir qu'un mensonage.[13]

When war became a real threat, the tone of his writing changed dramatically. He began a new, pacifist approach that demonstrated his anti-militant feelings and underlined the twin themes of pacifism and humanity.

The Patriot: Zola's Fight For France

"Que les peuples se lèvent, adjure-t-il, et refusent de se battre!" cried Zola.[14] His was a voice in the wilderness in July 1870. War hysteria had taken control; the crowds on the boulevards in Paris urged the French forces on to Berlin.

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[13]Émile Zola, Le Rappel, 15 May 1870, quoted in Martin Kanes, L'Atelier de Zola (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1963), 214-215.

[14]Émile Zola, Le Rappel, 11 July 1870, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 119.

For several days, Zola walked the streets watching sadly. The scenes were etched upon his memory: the last chapter of his novel, Nana, evoked the fervent spirit that he witnessed on the boulevards in July 1870:

> Des torches passaient encore, secouant des flammeches; au loin, les bandes moutonnaient, allongés dans les ténèbres, pareilles à des troupeaux menés de nuit à l'abattoir; et ce vertige, ces masses confuses, roulées par le flot, exhalaient une terreur, une grande pitié de massacres futurs. Ils s'étourdissaient, les cris se brisaient dans l'ivresse de leur fièvre se ruant à l'inconnu, là-bas, derrière le mur noir de l'horizon.[15]

On 11 July 1870 his article entitled, "La guerre, egrené des souvenirs de 1854 et de 1859," appeared in La Cloche. It concluded: "Ah! guerre maudite qui fait pleurer la France, je n'ai connu de toi que le tapage du départ et les larmes du retour, mais c'est assez pour t'exérer!"[16] Appealing directly to the people of France he asked:

> Est-ce que les peuples, ceux du nord et ceux du midi, ne vont pas se lever et dire: "Non, nous ne nous battons plus, nous n'épouserons plus les querelles de familles royales; et pour qu'ils n'aient plus d'armées, nous licencions les armées; et pour qu'ils ne se disputent plus les trônes, nous brûlons les trônes![17]

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[15]Émile Zola, Nana, quoted in ibid.

[16]Émile Zola, "La Guerre," 14 July 1870, in La Cloche, quoted in Kanes, L'Atelier de Zola, 239.

[17]Ibid.

The outbreak of war in 1870 was a watershed for Zola. Thirty years old that year, he had married his longtime companion Alexandrine, a few months earlier.[18] He had completed two novels and was at work on the projected series Les Rougon-Macquart, which was to analyze the society of the Second Empire. His circle of fellow artists and writers now included Gustave Flaubert and Edmond Goncourt. He thought of himself as an established literary figure living in a working-class neighborhood, where he held regular Thursday evening Salons.[19] A staunch republican, he had gradually become more radical in his political outlook. Zola's reaction to the war was a mixture of dismay and pragmatism. Unlike Renan, he was not surprised by the news. As a journalist he knew how tense the international situation was. Fully dedicated to the overthrow of the imperial regime, he understood that war would be necessary before a republic could be established. While recognizing that war would be the means to overthrow the Second Empire regime, his reasons for war were different: he was strongly against a war in favor of Napoleon III's succession. He had taken every opportunity to criticize the foreign policy of Napoléon III. Aside from this Zola was a

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[18]Gabrielle-Alexandrine Meley (1839-1925).

[19]Zola and his wife moved to the Batignolles area of Paris where they lived for many years. Zola's Thursday night salons were held in their home in rue Condamine and included as regular guests Edmond Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, and Édouard Manet.

pacifist whose nature disagreed entirely with the basic concept of fighting wars.

The war, however, did provide a literary benefit for Zola. Originally, he had designed the concluding novel of Les Rougon-Macquart around the Italian campaign of 1859.[20] The current 1870 conflict now made the story conveniently real. La Débâcle, as the novel was to be called, was happening before his very eyes; he could live out his own proposed war story.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude that Zola was happy at the news of war. Glad though he was to see the end of the Second Empire, he became quickly revolted by the shouts of "A Berlin!" His reaction to the public warmongering was similar to that of Ernest Renan. Zola however did not need time to adapt to the situation before acting. He immediately began to use his position as a journalist to make the public aware of what was happening:

> Oh! laisse-moi te dire toute la vérité. Tu pleures, tu t'emportes, tu donnes à l'Europe le spectacle d'une mauvaise tête, qu'irrite une résistance imprévue. Mais nous savons tous que cette crise vient de ton génie lui-même, de ton âme tendre, de ton intelligence cultivée de toutes les qualités, de tous les raffinements de coeur et d'esprit qui t'ont mise au premier rang des peuples, comme une reine de grace et de courage.[21]

Practical problems caused by the war now intervened to absorb Zola personally. La Curée was being serialized in the

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[20]Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola, 79.

[21]Émile Zola, "La Guerre," 14 July 1870, in La Cloche, quoted in Kanes, L'Atelier de Zola, 239.

newspaper Le Siècle; first reviews of this new work had been favorable.[22] But once the country was mobilized, the newspaper was suspended, ending the serialization and leaving Zola unemployed.

Suffering from a severe myopic condition and the only son of a widow, he was exempt from military service. Although against war in principle, he still attempted to join the National Defence forces, where he was refused on account of his poor eyesight. His move may have been prompted by the fact that some of his friends had enlisted, making him anxious to demonstrate his own patriotism. His family's military background, arousing memories of his dead father, may also have prompted his decision. It was a halfhearted move on his part, however, for Zola had no interest in fighting. Needing an outlet for his patriotism, he turned instead to reporting the war. Uninhibited by the possible consequences of political reporting during a national emergency, he was quick to protest: "Je voudrais aujourd'hui une voix... qui raconte la panique des foules, les poussées féroces des soldats grisés l'horreur de la tuerie folle."[23] His own revolt was brewing; on 25 July 1870 he wrote a column warning of the future disaster: "Le petit village, aujourd'hui, inconnu, perdu sur

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[22]Émile Zola, Les Rougons-Macquart tome II, Henri Mitterand ed. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), tomes 1-5, 1960-7).

[23]Émile Zola, Le Rappel, 14 July 1870, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 119.

une carte du théatre de la guerre, et dont demain la rivière sera rouge. Il vive éternellement dans les siècles, comme un coupe-gorge, un endroit louche où deux nations se seront égorgées pour le bon plaisir de deux princes."[24]

On 5 August 1870 he took a further radical step, publishing an article in La Cloche entitled "Vive La France!" The accumulation of three weeks of tension, fear and frustration had brought forth an undeniable feeling of rage within himself. It would be repeated often during his career when he felt real justice denied in the name of the few for the sacrifice of the many:

> A cette heure, il y a sur les bords du Rhin cinquante mille soldats qui ont dit non à l'Empire. Ils ne voulaient plus la guerre, plus des armées permanentes, plus de ce terrible pouvoir qui met entre les mains d'un seul la fortune et la vie d'une nation...
>
> La République est là-bas sur les bords du Rhin, elle compte cinquante mille héros: elle sera de la victorie. Et nous, nous les acclamerons parce qu'ils seront certainement par les plus braves.[25]

He portrayed the reaction of a soldier, leaving for the front:

> Vous qui écrivez dans un journal, dites donc a l'empereur de passer devant nos lignes en appelant les soldats qui ont voté non. Nous lèverons tous la main. Nous demanderons à former le premier corps d'attaque. Et vous verrez, le monde dira: Ces républicains ne voulaient que la grandeur de la France. Des bien au pay qu'il peut compter sur nous. On l'a mis en péril. Nous réparerons les folies cruelles des rois. Et toujours sur les champs de bataille on trouvera les

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[24]Ibid., 120.

[25]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 5 August 1870, quoted in ibid., 120.

> soldats citoyens à l'avant-garde, morant comme ils ont voté, pour la France, pour la France seule.[26]

Two other incriminating passages followed:

> Où plutôt, ne dites rien. Laissez-nous faire notre besogne en silence. Ne pleurez plus, donnez-nous par votre recueillement le courage de mourir où de vaincre. Nous serons les derniers martyrs. Vous tremperez vos mains dans notre sang et vous le secouerez à la face de ceux qui l'ont fait couler.
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> ...Il (le soldat) disait: oublions ceux qui ont voulu cette tuerie, ne voyons que les frontières en danger, ne faisons que des voeux pour nos enfants. La République est là-bas sur les bords du Rhin, elle compte cinquante mille héros: elle sera de la victoire. Et nous, nous les acclamerons parce qu'ils seront certinement parmi les plus braves. Au retour, ils nous diront: c'est fait, la France n'est plus menacée par les Prussiens, délivrons-la maintenant de ses autres ennemis.[27]

To write as Zola did was extremely risky. Careful to involve only himself, he continued his argument in a final article in La Cloche entitled "Les nerfs de la France." A call for French resistance in the face of Prussian advancement, it clearly demonstrated Zola's own faith in the country. Urging the population to fight to the end, he concluded: "Ah! chère France, fille nerveuse, que la victoire rend folle, comme la défaite, promets-moi d'être sage, de ne point te rendre malade de joie demain, quand tu auras renvoyé à sa bauge la brute Allemagne."[28]

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[26]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 5 August 1870, quoted in Leblond-Zola, Émile Zola raconté par sa fille, 59.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Émile Zola, "Les nerfs De La France," 17 August 1870, quoted in Kanes, L'Atelier de Zola, 248.

Two days later Zola was served with papers by the imperial government charging him with being unpatriotic, of inciting hatred toward the government and of provoking public disobedience. In the frenzied events of the next several days, the summons was overlooked. The French defeat at the Battle of Wissembourg and the subsequent fall of the regime on 4 September 1870 saved him from a certain jail sentence.

On 18 August 1870 La Cloche suspended publication, leaving Zola shaken.[29] He wrote to Edmond Goncourt on 22 August: "This frightful war has made the pen fall from my hand. I am like a lost soul. I wander aimlessly around the streets."[30] Feeling lost and depressed, he decided to accompany his wife to the south a few days after the Battle of Sedan. Alexandrine Zola, frightened by the deteriorating situation, wanted to get out of Paris. Choosing Marseille as their place of exile, the couple left with Zola's mother on 7 September 1870. Before leaving, he wrote once again to Goncourt: "Ma femme est tellement effrayée que je me décide à l'éloigner. Je l'accompagne. Mais si je puis rentrer dans quelques jours, je reviendrai à mon poste."[31] Two weeks later the Prussian siege

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[29]French newspapers were suspended by the government in mid-August 1870. A few selected papers were allowed to report war news.

[30]Émile Zola, letter to Edmond Goncourt, 22 August 1870, quoted in Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola, 73.

[31]Ibid.

of Paris began, dispelling any possibility of his return. He did not go back to the capital until March 1871.

Zola and the War: Adversity in the Face of Disaster

Zola harbored no illusions about the future. A known radical, he could not risk remaining in Paris. Marseille would be far safer, for republican support in that city had elected Gambetta and Esquiros as deputies in 1869.[32] It had also been the site of anti-imperial demonstrations in the beginning of August 1870; a republican victory had triumphed in the recent municipal elections, so Zola felt confident in his place of refuge.[33] Politically, Marseille was highly volatile, another reason why the city may have interested Zola. He was, moreover, known in Marseille both for his republican sentiments and his name. He had numerous relations there as well as personal friends.[34] In the city where his father had

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[32]Alphonse Esquiros (1812-1876). Author and critic, he was a republican deputy in Marseille and former colleague of Zola on La Tribune. Henri Mitterand, "Emile Zola à Marseille et à Bordeaux de Septembre à Décembre 1870," Les Cahiers Naturalistes 22 (1966-67): 261-262.

[33]Ibid. Gustave Naquet, the Director of Peuple, radical democratic journal, and Gaston Crémieux, a radical lawyer. Zola was eagerly received by Naquet whose brother, had been his colleague the year before on La Tribune.

[34]Included were Marius Roux and Anthony Valabrègue. Roux, (1838-1905) a native of Aix-en-Provence who had gone to the same school as Zola, was a journalist in Marseille. Valabrègue, (1844-1900) who was also from Aix-en-Provence, was a writer and a friend of Zola's.

worked for many years, there were people in 1870 who remembered him still. Putting all his emotional energy into establishing himself in Marseille, Zola took some time to get the feel of the changed atmosphere.

A few days after his arrival, he contacted Emile Barlatier, the owner of the largest regional paper, La Sémaphore de Marseille. Another friend in the Marseille press, was Alfred Arnaud, proprietor of the Messager de Provence. Zola had been acquainted with him since 1865. Arnaud had published Zola's Les Mystères de Marseille in his paper. Mutual respect had led the two men to talk about founding a new paper in Marseille two years before. September 1870 was an opportune time for such an enterprise; Zola needed work and republican momentum was predominant. Taking advantage of the political atmosphere, Zola negotiated with Arnaud for a daily newspaper with a large circulation. The two men quickly agreed upon the name, La Marseillaise. Writing to fellow journalist Marius Roux, who was on holiday in nearby Aix, he said: "Sans toi, je n'ose tenter l'aventure. Avec toi, je crois le succes possible. Nous avons ici les hommes et les choses pour nous. Donne-moi une réponse immédiate..."[35] Roux, more experienced in journalism than Zola, was familiar with the more technical aspects of newspaper production. On 27 September 1870 the first edition of La Marseillaise appeared, selling for one

[35]Émile Zola, letter to Marius Roux, 19 September 1870, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 126.

cent. It lasted only four months before closing in December 1870. Political repression by the Marseille authorities or lack of funds was responsible.[36]

With no further possibility of earning any money from literary endeavors, Zola had few options; returning to Paris was out of the question while the capital was being bombarded by the Prussians. He had steadfastly refused to consider the possibility of a political position; now he agreed that it was a viable alternative. It necessitated, however, going to Bordeaux, where the National Defence Government was in exile.

In Bordeaux, with almost no money and few prospects, Zola remained isolated for several days, meditating upon his personal situation. He considered going to Algeria as an army correspondent but changed his mind when he learned that there was no available place for him. His letters to his wife and mother in Marseille reveal a desperate state of mind.[37] He was on the point of returning to Marseille, when Zola recognized an old family friend on the street. Alexandre Glais-Bizoin had been a left-wing government member with

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[36]No copy of La Marseillaise has ever been found. There was nothing among the documentation given to the Bibliothèque Nationale by Zola's widow after his death and to date no issue has ever been traced. Roux returned to Paris and reported civil disorder in Marseille. The radical left-wing paper Le Rappel on which Zola had worked was sympathetic to the republican tendencies of La Marseillaise. Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 126-127, for a discussion of this topic.

[37]B.H. Bakker, ed., Émile Zola Correspondance II 1868-1877, 232-264.

republican tendencies.[38] Receiving Zola kindly, Glais-Bizoin persuaded him to remain in Bordeaux, telling him that the government needed republicans. His previous experience on left-wing newspapers made him an ideal candidate for a political position. Glais-Bizoin asked him to be his personal secretary while they waited for a sub-prefect position to become available for Zola. Zola accepted, but his projected political appointment continued to remain unfilled. Finding work was a great anxiety; that he could contribute no active service was a source of sorrow. He took the unusual step of writing to Glais-Bizoin:

> J'aimerais à ne pas m'eloigner du midi où je suis très bien connu et où mon père a rendu de grands services. Vous connaissez mon dévouement à la cause de la liberté: je m'adresse à vous comme je me serais adressé à Eugène Pelletan et je vous demande ce qu'il m'aurait sans doute accordé: un poste où je puisse me rendre utile.
>
> Je sais que la Patrie a besoin d'hommes. Et c'est pourquoi je me presente.[39]

By now, Zola's one overriding interest was to serve the cause of liberty in the new republic.

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[38]Alexandre Glais-Bizoin (1800-1877). Founder of La Tribune in 1868, he had been a left-wing government opposition member since 1863. In Bordeaux he was a member of the government opposition forces.

[39]Émile Zola, letter to Glais-Bizoin, 7 December 1870, quoted in David Baguley, "Émile Zola en décembre 1870. Une lettre inédite à Glais-Bizoin," Les Cahiers Naturalistes 34 (1967): 165-168.

1871: Zola's Destiny

On 16 February 1871 an official announcement in La Cloche stated that the paper would publish reports on the meetings of the Assemblée Nationale. It was a turning point for Zola who, although he did not yet sign his articles, was probably the author of one entitled "Assemblée Nationale."[40]

Zola's role as a political journalist, reporting the meetings of the Provisionary Government in Bordeaux, was one of the most involved and passionate parts of his journalistic career.[41] He went daily to the Grand-Théatre, which had been quickly converted into a "palais législatif" for the meetings of the newly elected Assemblée Nationale. In his articles Zola revived the poignant emotion that punctuated the atmosphere. Now parliamentary journalist for La Cloche and La Sémaphore de Marseille, he sent reports to both papers. His own emotion was evident as he recreated the scene for his readers:

> J'avais en face de moi la ligue diplomatique. Toute l'Europe était là...Et je regardais l'Europe, tandis que Louis Blanc, jetait aux applaudissements de l'Assemblée cette phrase sanglante: "Est ce siege de Paris, l'Histoire pourra-t-elle l'envisager sans se demander ce que, pendant ce temps-là. Faisait l'Europe?" L'Europe, dans sa loge n'a pas bronché; Lord Lyons gardait son flègme superbe d'Anglais satisfait; M. de Metternich souriait vaguement d'un

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[40]Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 140.

[41]In 1928 Henry Bordeaux researched Zola's role in Bordeaux. La Revue Bleue, 4e série, tome V, 1896, quoted in Leblond-Zola, Émile Zola raconté par sa fille, 68.

sourire involontaire. Vers la fin, une dame est venue s'appuyer sur la rampe de velours rouge.[42]

When Zola became correspondent that year for La Sémaphore de Marseille, he was cautioned to be prudent in his judgement. The management of this liberal and moderate provincial paper feared the radical opinions of the young Paris journalist. The editor wrote to Zola: "Vous connaissez les opinions modérés, mais libérales, du Sémaphore. Vous saurez par conséquent éviter toute exagération dans vos appréciations."[43] The extent to which Zola followed this directive is questionable. La Sémaphore favored restoration of the monarchy; its objective was the return of an Orléanist prince to the throne. Although he did not support a resumption of the monarchy, Zola did not entirely disagree. Far-sightedly, he realized that an Orléans prince, unable to fool the French people, would quickly reveal his incompetence. Zola published his first "Lettres de Bordeaux" in La Sémaphore on 17 February 1871, a series chronicling the events of the new Assemblée Nationale government established there after the armistice. A new era began for the paper; being both novelist and journalist, Zola vividly recreated the scene for his readers: "La salle est

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[42]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 2 March 1871, quoted in Leblond-Zola, Émile Zola raconté par sa fille, 69.

[43]Louis Ulbach, letter to Zola, in Henri Chemel, "Zola Collaborateur du Sémaphore de Marseille 1871-1877," Les Cahiers Naturalistes 6 (1960-61): 555-588. Louis Ulbach (1822-1899) was the editor of La Cloche.

toute rouge, les banquettes rouges, la tribune rouge. Sous le grand lustre, on dirait une mare de sang."[44]

> Imaginez une chapelle ardente; on entre là, à deux heures, avec du soleil plein les yeux, et l'on tombe dans une salle éclairée par trois lustres. En bas, les banquettes rouges, sur la scène, dont le rideau est levé, une tribune et une estrade tendues de draperies pourpres, au milieu d'un décor de salon. C'est là que la France va être exécutée. On cherche le bourreau dans les coins d'ombre.
>
> Aux galeries dans les loges, beaucoup de dames, un public de premières. Les mains gantées tiennent des lorgnettes.[45]

He described dramatically the background setting of the new government headquarters, the hastily reconverted Grand-théâtre. Feeling strongly that "Une chapelle ardente" was hardly a suitable place to decide the destiny of France, he recreated the emotional scene in the hushed house as Thiers read out the harsh terms of the peace treaty. Zola's descriptions were visual portraits designed to arouse the readers' emotions. Employing colour and passion in his writing, he wanted to share the national humiliation with his readers; collectively the people had to bear the guilt for the defeat. Without their involvement there could be no clear understanding of the French position. Thus Zola appealed to the people in the same way as Louis Veuillot often did in his

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[44]Émile Zola, La Cloche, quoted in ibid., 558.

[45]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 19 February 1971, quoted in Mitterand, Émile Zola Journaliste, 133.

newspaper articles.[46] Anxious to make the readers aware of how little had been said publically about present affairs he wrote:

> Que font Thiers? Jules Favre? Quelles sont les conditions de la paix? Nous n'en savons rien. Vous pouvez imaginer les fables qui circulent, les bruits les plus contradictories qui s'accrédient; on se réunit, on se groupe sur les places; on discute, on fait des discours, on s'agite dans le vide, on interroge les figures des ministres: Ah! M. Jules Simon a souri aujourd'hui, donc les nouvelles sont bonnes. - Ah! M. Dufaure est triste, donc les nouvelles sont mauvaises.
>
> ...Les membres de l'Assemblée, si l'on en croit les on-dit, reviendraient à Paris; la semaine prochaine, et cependant ils ont bien peur. Paris les affraie; une ville révolutionnaire, une ville qui renverse les empires, une ville quit fait le 4 Septembre, une ville qui trouble les déliberations, une grande ville enfin où rayonnemnt toutes les intelligences et tous les talents, c'est un danger, et les députés cherchent avec une sollicitude parfaite un coin de terre où ils pourront vivre et mourir en paix.[47]

Clearly, Zola was struggling with his own dissatisfaction over the situation, while trying to come to terms with the defeat. Writing in this manner thus became cathartic for him; he relieved his own distress, while satisfying his conscience that he was doing his utmost to keep the population informed. That he was devastated by what he witnessed is clear; his daily reports are impassioned pleas to his readers to understand what had happened, but not necessarily to accept

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[46]Louis Veuillot was famous for his passionate writing style that often swayed public opinion to the side of the Church.

[47]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 25 February 1871, quoted in Mitterand, Émile Zola Journalist, 134.

the situation. An agonized Zola sent this dispatch to La Cloche:

> Toute ma vie, je me souviendrai de cette heure formidable. Les tribunes étaient anxieuses. Vous le connaissez, ce traité: la cession de l'Alsace, moins Belfort, le cession de Metz et d'une partie de la Lorraine, cinq milliards d'indemnité, l'occupation d'un quartier de Paris, le paiement de l'indemnite en trois ans, sous une garantie financière, ou sous la garantie d'une occupation prussienne qui cesserait au fur et à mesure des versements.
>
> La salle tout entière était dans une superbe douloureuse. Des grondements couraient dans les tribunes. La lecture du traité s'est achevee dans un silence de mort. A partir de ce moment, l'Assemblée a été comme frappée de folie...
>
> Quand je suis sorti de la salle des séances, la nuit tombait, la foule stationnait sous le crépuscule, inquiète et avide de la mauvaise nouvelle. Il m'a semblé sortir d'un caveau funéraire et traverser un peuple en deuil qui venait de conduire les funérailles de sa patrie. Pas un cri: le chiffre de cinq milliards, les noms de Metz et de Strasbourg couraient comme des sanglots. Ah! le soleil est couché, ce soir, et Bordeaux a pris des vêtements de deuil.[48]

Reading beyond the literary metaphor that Zola used to successfully reproduce his own desolation and anxiety one perceives the real anxiety that Zola felt. A good Frenchman, he, too, shared the overriding concern for the fate of France. His question was: had France sunk so low that she was reduced to being a powerless entity whose destiny would be decided in a gaudy theatre in Bordeaux? Zola witnessed daily the conflicts between the diverse political elements first hand. The right-wing majority, united under the political banner of the Bourbon prince, wanted the immediate demise of the

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[48]Ibid., 136.

fledgling Republic. The left-wing republican element was itself divided into different factions: one that wanted to preserve the bourgeois class versus a more extreme group that advocated abolition of the new workers' organizations in Paris: "L'extrême droite ricanait. Le beau malheur! Un homme de genie moins! Mais il restait vingt grotesques qui ne savent même pas voter, qui ne distinguent sans doute pas leur main gauche de leur main droite."[49]

From the first meeting he attended, Zola showed his extreme dislike of the right-wing majority. In ironic prose he criticized them bitterly: "Ah! C'est un grand soulagement de penser que les partis des vieux âges morts n'ont à opposer à toute notre activité et à toute notre jeunesse que les médiocrités et des incapacités de cette force."[50] On 10 March 1871 the Assemblée Nationale abruptly voted to move its headquarters to Versailles. Zola wrote: "La question qui me parâit la plus délicate est l'attitude de défiance et d'irritation secrète que prennent vis-à-vis l'un de l'autre Paris et la province."[51] He was shocked at the choice of Versailles as seat of the government:

> Pourquoi pas Pontoise? Le désagrément de trouver, dans les armoires des hôtels, les vieilles pantoufles des

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[49]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 13 March 1871, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 136-137.

[50]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 10 March 1871, quoted in Colette Baker, "Introduction biographique," in Bakker, Émile Zola Correspondance II 1868-1877, 40.

[51]Ibid.

> officiers, prussiens, sera racheté par la douce pensee que l'Assemblée siège dans une ville fortifiée par M. de Moltke, le premier général du monde. Dieu merci, les Allemands n'auront pas fait que bombarder Paris; ils auront mis nos réprésentants à l'abri de Belleville et de la Villette.
>
> Je ris, et c'est lugubre. Que va faire Paris livre à lui-même, décrété de mauvais esprit, regardé avec défiance comme le pire ennemi de la France.[52]

Despite his feeling, he was forced to acknowledge the move to Versailles as "le moindre mal," resolutely explaining to his readers that he accepted the move in the same way he had accepted the peace treaty: "J'ai tout à la fois plaidé pour la paix et contre la traité."[53] On 14 March 1871 he finally returned to Paris, whence he commuted daily to Versailles on the special train for parliamentary correspondents.

His return to Paris was marked by an improvement in his morale. Glad that he no longer had to witness the shoddy spectacle in Bordeaux, he went back to his house in the Batignolles area, relieved to find it in good condition.[54] Still, he could not erase the impression that the war had left. From Bordeaux he had written to Paul Alexis: "J'espère

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[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Zola's house at 4 rue Condamine had been seized and occupied during the war. Paul Alexis, who was in Paris throughout the war, had hastened to save Zola's belongings, particularly his manuscripts.

qu'on trouvera vite les cinq milliards pour congédier ces maudits Prussiens."[55] In Paris he felt more hopeful, writing to Alexis that, "la paix est faite. Nous sommes les écrivains de demain, notre jour arrive."[56] On 6 March 1871 he wrote to Émile Laborde: "Après cette rude secousse, la France a besoin de repos, et c'est nous, jeunes hommes de vingt-cinq à trente ans, qui sommes les travailleurs de demain."[57] On 4 July 1871 he wrote, in retrospect, to Paul Cézanne: "Paris renaît. C'est comme je te l'ai souvent répété, notre règne qui arrive."[58] These comments show that Zola, one of the young republicans of the future, now recognized a new era that was beginning in France. Young men, like himself, would have a chance to establish their reputations in a more just society that was the backbone of the new republic.

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[55]Émile Zola, letter to Paul Alexis, 17 February 1871, in Bakker, Émile Zola Correspondance II 1868-1877, 279. Paul Alexis (1851-1901) came from Aix-en-Provence and had attended the same school as Zola, although after Zola had left. He admired Zola and became his close confidant. Alexis was the author of Notes d'un Ami (Paris: G. Charpentier, Éditeur, 1882).

[56]Ibid., 2 March 1871.

[57]Émile Zola, letter to Émile Laborde, 6 March 1871, quoted in Bakker, Émile Zola Correspondance II 1868-1877, 283. Émile Laborde (1845-1882) was the cousin of Zola's wife, Alexandrine.

[58]Émile Zola, letter to Paul Cézanne, 4 July 1871, quoted in ibid., 294.

Zola's Own War: Paris During the Commune

Another trauma began for Zola when civil war broke out in Paris, followed by the declaration of the Commune.[59] Although the city was surrounded by hostile troops, with barricades erected in the streets, trains continued to operate from the Gare St. Lazare to Versailles. It was in this manner that Zola managed to travel between the two cities. He continued writing dispatches for La Cloche until the newspaper was suppressed on 18 April 1871. After that date he sent his reports to La Sémaphore de Marseille so that readers in the provinces could know what was happening in the capital. Zola's house was situated in a radical quarter of working-class Paris, allowing him an excellent vantage point from which to witness events: "Certes, nul plus que moi ne condamne les misérables fous et les intrigants éhonteés qui oppriment la grande ville. Mais il ne faut pourtant pas, emportés par une légitime colere, qu'on noircisse outre mesure la situation et qu'on épouvante les parents et les amis que nous avons en province."[60]

The Assemblée Nationale was installed in Versailles on 22 March 1871. Zola was in a unique position to give eye-witness reports on the meetings, as well as to record the atmosphere

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[59]Insurrection began in Paris on 18 March 1871. The new municipal council declared by the citizens on that day called itself the Commune de Paris.

[60]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore, 25 April 1871, quoted in Chemel, "Zola Collaborateur du Sémaphore de Marseille, " 560.

surrounding events taking place in Paris. The ensuing fight for dominance between the two cities found him squarely in favor of Paris. The capital of France remained the forever beautiful city of his imagination: "J'aime Paris d'amour et je le crois capable de toutes les grandeurs," he wrote the day after the Commune had been overrun by the Versaillais.[61]

It was republican sentiment prevalent in the capital that had been responsible for the instinctive fear of the Assemblée Nationale. At first the government had considered Fontainebleau as the site for its headquarters, but had abandoned the idea for fear of being too close to republican Paris. Zola, frustrated at the favoritism shown to provincial Versailles, now thrust himself into the battle, consistently writing articles that demonstrated the differences between the two cities. Basic to his argument was his firm contention that the affairs of the country could only be directed from Paris:

> Versaille continue à être le dimanche un désert torride dans lequel passe de loin en loin l'ombre d'un député. Cette cité des morts changée en capitale politique est un des plus lugubres spectacles que je connaisse.
>
> C'est le siège qui convient à ces hobereaux moyenâgeux qui rêvent de restaurer le drapeau blanc et Henri V, à tous ces gentilshommes rêvant de la cour de Louis XIV, à ce comte Jaubert, ce trop spirituel représentant, qui joue à la Chambre les marquis d'ancien régime.[62]

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[61]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore de Marseille, 26 July 1871, quoted in ibid., 559.

[62]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore de Marseille, 7 April 1871, quoted in ibid.

Zola recognized the conflict between the two cities as something greater; it was a battle between the past and the future.[63] Decadent Versailles represented the worst of the past; republican Paris was the hope of the future. His convinced republican views could not let him understand the antagonism that the government leaders had shown for the capital:

> Thiers a abandonné carrément Paris. Il l'accuse de n'avoir pas soutenu le gouvernment. Ici l'Assemblée délire, les applaudissements roulent comme un tonnerre. Je crains que la voûte ne croule...[64]

> M. Jules Favre se charge de prononcer le terrible réquisitoire contre la ville qui ne s'est pas levée à la voix des ministres...Je souhaite qu'il ne soit pas gros d'orages. M. Jules Favre n'est pas populaire à Paris... Il a parlé d'une répression prompte et énergique. Puis il parut regretter de n'voir permis aux Prussiens de désarmer la garde nationale. Je crains fort que toutes ces phrases n'aient un écho.[65]

Zola felt that Versailles was a disastrous choice for the site of the Government of National Defence, one that could only create additional tensions between the two cities. He predicted a new conflict: "la guerre éclatera de nouveau, si la province fait le rêve de tenir la grande ville en prison."[66] He even thought that a better solution would have

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[63]Zola would pick up this theme of past versus future again in his novel La Débacle.

[64]Émile Zola, La Cloche, 22 March 1871, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 140.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., 559.

been for the government to remain in Bordeaux until the national mood had become less emotional. Then a move back to Paris would have been astute: "au centre du pays, à cette place glorieuse que les siècles ont consacrée."[67]

The Commune never completely met with Zola's approval. He did not criticize the revolutionaries, but reserved his contempt for their leaders. Above all, the street scenes he often witnessed in Paris violated his feelings for truth and social justice:

> La terreur règne, la liberté individuelle et le respect dû aux propriétés sont vilés, le clergé est odieusement poursuivi, les perquisitions et les réquisitions sont employées comme mode de gouvernement. Mais il est faux que le sang coule dans les rues, comme je le lis dans certaines feuilles; il est faux qu'un seul meurtre ait été commis depuis l'épouvantable assassinat des géneraux Clément Thomas et Lecomte; il est faux même que le vol se pratique sans un certain appareil légal; je veux parler par exemple des formalités remplies pour envoyer à la Monnaie l'argenterie du Ministère des les Affaires étrangères.[68]

Feeling strongly that his readers had to be told the true story of what was happening, he recounted what he saw as he wandered around the city. Twice Zola was arrested and almost shot as a traitor. His life was saved on one occasion, when the son of the Minister of Education, whom he had known in Versailles, identified him.[69] In May he found the situation

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[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Gustave Simon, son of Jules Simon who was a member of the Government of National Defence. Leblond-Zola, Zola raconté par sa fille, 71-72.

so dangerous that he took the step of getting a Prussian passport so that he could seek refuge in the village of Bennecourt.[70] Previously Zola had said that he would never be so unpatriotic as to request a Prussian document. This situation warranted a change of opinion when he sensed the danger about him. Although his real sentiments were for the republic still, he did not wish to foolishly flirt with death. His two experiences of near disaster had made him more aware of how quickly tragedy could happen. Daily street scenes of brutality and murder were clearly in his mind when he wrote to his mother from St. Denis on 12 May 1871: "J'ai de très mauvaises nouvelles et je crains bien que, si vous restiez a Paris nous ne nous trouvions séparés. Aussi ai-je résolu que vous viendrez me rejoindre demain. Faites donc vos préparatifs. Je ne serai tranquille que lorsque nous serons tous les trois loin de Paris."[71] His desire that his mother depart quickly demonstrates Zola's fear about the deteriorating situation. What Zola objected to in the rule of the Commune was not its revolutionary ideal but its violence and killings of innocent people. His reports consistently indicate that the situation in Paris was out of control. His

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[70]The Prussians in May 1871 still controlled a small area north of Paris. Prussian passports were required to gain access. Trains went daily from the city to the Porte St. Denis. From there it was possible to cross through Prussian lines and continue on to other parts of the country.

[71]Émile Zola, letter to his mother, 12 May 1871, quoted in Rodolphe Walter, "Zola et la Commune: un exil volontaire," Les Cahiers Naturalistes 43 (1972): 29.

own shocked reaction and pity for victims was filled with republican sentiments:

> J'ai une grand pitié pour les victims de cette épouvantable lutte. Que d'hommes trompés et égarés pour quelques fous! Les listes des morts et des blessés que publient les journaux de Versailles sont navrantes à lire. Ce sont presque tous des ouvriers; ils sont mariés, ils ont quatre ou cinq enfants. Que de veuves et d'orphelins jetés dans le vice de la grande ville!
>
> Certes pour les vrais ouvriers, pour ceux que des besoins ou des convictions poussent sous la mitraille, mes compassions sont grands, je ne crains pas de le répéter. Il faut surtout pénétrer dans une des salles où l'on dépose les victimes inconnues celles qu'on a ramassées sur le champ de bataille et qui attendent sur les dalles d'un Morgue qu'un parent ou un ami vienne les réclamer. C'est navrant![72]

Whenever he saw widows and fatherless children, Zola was moved to comment on the horrors of war. His anger and frustration knew no bounds when he saw large groups of Parisians watching the civil war from the Butte of Montmarte. The sight of French people enjoying the grisly spectacle was repugnant to him:

> Ce qui a été vraiment scandaleux, c'est le partie de plaisir que, pendant huit jours, les Parisiens sont allés faire à la Butte Montmartre. Là, sur la face ouest, dans un terrain vague, tout Paris s'est donné rendez-vous.C'est un magnifique amphitéâtre, pour assister de loin à la mâme établi des bacs; pour deux sous on était placé comme au parterre d'un théâtre. Les femmes surtout venaient en grand nombre. Puis c'étaient de grands éclats de rire dans cette foule. A chaque obus dont on apercevait au lointain l'explosion, on trépignait d'aise, on trouvait quelque bonne plaisanterie qui courait dans les groupes comme une fusée de gaieté.[73]

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[72]Ibid., 560-561.

[73]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore de Marseille, 9 May 1871, quoted in Chemel, "Zola Collaborateur du Sémaphore de Marseille," 561.

The burning of Paris was a horrible spectacle: "Jamais, en pleine civilisation, un aussi épouvantable crime n'a ravagé une grande cité..."[74] Overcome with emotion, Zola published the next morning a critical response to the spectacle that Thiers had described as "a necessary lesson to the workers."

> Je veux vous parler des tas de cadavres, qu'on a empliés sous les ponts. Non, jamais je n'oublierai l'affreux serrement de coeur que j'ai éprouvé en face de cet anas de chair humaine, sanglant, jeté au hasard sur le chemin de halage. Les têtes et les membres sont mêlés dans d'horribles dislocations. Du tas émergent les faces convulsées abominablement grotesques, ricanant par leur bouche noir et ouverte.[75]

Whereas Ernest Renan had seen the burning of the city in terms of the Apocalypse, Zola condemned it as painfully barbaric, a demonstration of the worst outburst of hostile actions:

> Je renonce à vous peindre l'aspect de Paris. On a passé la nuit dans une sorte d'aurore sanglante. Le ciel était livide, comme cuivré par l'approche d'un terrible orage et traversé par des éclairs rouges qui l'éclairaient largement. Et la fusillade ne cessait pas. On se battait dans cette épouvante, sous ce ciel diabolique qui faisait rêver à toutes les horreurs d'un enfer dantesque. Non, jamais pareil cauchemar n'a secoué d'un peuple, l'imagination des poètes les plus sombres est pauvre à côtés de cette bataille enragée dans la lueur fauve des incendies.
>
> On transporte tous les débris qu'on inhume loin de Paris, dans les cimetiéres des troupes, on avait rempli de cadavres les casemates des fortifications. Comme on ne pouvait songer à vider ces charniers, sans empester tout Paris, on s'est décidé à se servir des casemates comme de fours énormes; on a ouvert des cheminées par le haut, et l'on a ensuite mis le feu

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[74]Ibid.

[75]Ibid., 562.

> aux cadavres qui ont cuit sous terre. Tout cela est horrible. Et pendant que les orgues jouaient, que les fidèles s'agenouillaient devant les superbes catafaltques, je songeais à ces morts affreux à demi-pourris qu'on brûle comme un tas d'ordures malasaines...
>
> ...On accuse les fossoyeurs improvisés d'avoir enterré les blessés et les morts. Dans certains jardins, on aurait vu des bras sortir à demi de terre et s'agiter. On prêtend qu'a Auteuil on a trouvé d'un blessé qui avait réussi à sortir à demi de terre, et qui est mort là, les jambes encore prises dans le sol, les bras horriblement tordus, la face affreuse, tournée vers le ciel...[76]

On the morning after the last of the Fédérés had been executed at Père Lachaise Cemetery, Zola walked through the devastated area.[77] The incredible sight of desecrated tombs and monuments remained indelibly etched upon his memory. Cemeteries became one of the most often used images in his novels. He duly reported the carnage to the readers of La Sémaphore.[78]

> Toute cette partie du cimetière est piètinée, comme si une lutte sauvage s'u était engagée corps à corps. Ça et là des mares de sang, des cadavres qu'on n'a pas même pris la peine de relever. J'ai vu un enfant de dix-sept ans, allongée sur une pierre blanc, les bras croisés, pareil à une de ces roides statues que le moyen âge couchait sur les mausolées.[79]

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[76]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore, 11-12 June 1871, quoted in Jean-Claude Leblond, "Pages retrouvées," Les Cahiers Naturalistes (1956): 124-127.

[77]The "Fédérés" were the name given to the soldiers of the Commune.

[78]Émile Zola, La Sémaphore, 2 June 1871, quoted in Chemel, "La Collaboration du Sémaphore de Marseille," 562.

[79]Ibid.

Zola, the political correspondent who emerged from the meetings in Bordeaux and Versailles to witness the Commune and Bloody Week in Paris, was a very different person from the young idealistic journalist of 1870. Because he was a convinced republican, Zola recognized in the 1870 conflict the opportunity to promote the republican cause. Thinking that he could really change readers' opinions, he used La Sémaphore to try to make subscribers understand that "republic" was not synonymous with "revolution." A democratic republic would still be capable of ensuring law and order, allowing the same bourgeois way of life to continue in France. The leaders of the Third Republic thus assumed for Zola a particular importance. Thiers represented what was already present in the Republic, while Gambetta represented its future.[80] For Zola they were the only two really great figures of the Third Republic: "ce sont les seuls hommes que nos désastres ont mis au-dessus du vulgaire."[81]

Truth was the predominant all-important factor. Zola always remained constant in his insistence that the people know the truth, often forcing the public to read disagreeable, yet necessary facts. Although he began his career as a political journalist hesitantly, he quickly realized the unique opportunity that the situation offered for a clearer

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[80]Léon Gambetta (1838-1882). He was Minister of The Interior in the National Defence government. He resigned from the provisionary government in February 1871.

[81]Ibid., 566.

understanding of a republic. As a writer he understood the benefits of the press, manipulating it to a certain extent as he deemed necessary. He mostly used it to advantage to leave a splendid record of the 1870-1871 situation. Whether he did so deliberately, under an organized plan supported by his republican friends, or whether he acted independently is unimportant. That he did so is testimony in itself to his patriotism. His passionate feelings and abiding emotion for the country endure in all his newspaper articles, as well as in his correspondence of the period. Later, he put his memories to use in his novels, thus immortalizing the situation for posterity. It must, however, be remembered that Zola's overall objective was indeed the overthrow of the Second Empire. As part of the generation of young men who supported the establishment of a republic, he awaited its coming eagerly. Once it was at hand, Zola, like his republican contemporaries, believed that it was essential to educate the population to the republican concept.

In The Line of Fire: Zola and La Débâcle

In 1892, Zola, then at the height of his career as a novelist, decided to write the war novel that he had first envisaged before 1870. He now established that it would be number five of ten novels in the Rougon-Macquart series. The Zola who wrote La Débâcle in 1892 was a very different man

from the young journalist and writer of 1870-1871.[82] The twenty-one years that ensued from 1871 to 1892 had seen his evolution into a respected, immensely popular French novelist. From his earnings he had acquired an estate outside Paris where well-known intellectuals and other French writers regularly gathered.[83] By now the recipient of the Legion of Honour and the elected President of the Société des gens des lettres, only membership in the Académie Française still eluded him.[84] His journalistic career had ended in 1880 when he announced his retirement from journalism, stating that he required "peace of mind" in order to concentrate on only one task at a time.[85]

The 1870 conflict provided Zola with a modern disaster that fit well into his ideas:

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[82]Émile Zola, La Débâcle, trans. from the French with an introduction by Leonard Tancock (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

[83]Zola had bought and restored a farm on the banks of the Seine twenty-five kilometres from Paris in 1879. He entertained Cézanne, Daudet, Maupassant, Flaubert and Edmond Goncourt there. The group of admirers and literary and artistic figures who often gathered at Médan were known as the "Médan Group."

[84]Zola was elected President of the Société des Gens de Lettres in Paris in 1891. He undertook this position because of his extreme nervousness at speaking in public, hoping that it would help him become calmer when called upon to deliver speeches. Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola, 114. Zola received the Legion of Honour in 1888. Lanoux, Zola, 175.

[85]Émile Zola, Le Voltaire, 17 August 1880 quoted in Alan Schom, Émile Zola A Bourgeois Rebel (London: Macdonald Queen Anne Press, 1987), 92-97.

> ...la chute des Bonaparte, dont j'avais besoin comme artiste, et que toujours je trouvais fatalement au bout du drame, sans oser l'espérer si prochaine, est venue me donner le dénouement terrible et nécessaire de mon oeuvre.[86]

This study has demonstrated how the 1870 conflict defied his strong pacifist sentiments and interrupted Zola's writing career. Ironically what eventually made his task as a novelist easier was the history that was created before his own eyes in 1870; it provided him with needed material. He put his experience to use once back in Paris after the end of the civil war when he then completed plans for the saga that included "le roman sur la débâcle." By 1890, with the hindsight of two decades, Zola certainly knew that such a book would incur the wrath of the right-wing political element in French society as well as that of the nationalist press. It would, he was sure, revive certain scandals still rampant in France at that time about the actual causes of the 1870 war. In short, he felt that it would rekindle feelings within the country that, although buried, were certainly not yet dead: "I will be called an enemy of France" he wrote.[87] The realization saddened him, but it was not enough to deter him from writing the story of the war that he needed as a

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[86]La Fortune des Rougons, preface, quoted in Helen Rufener, Biography of A War Novel (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946), 1.

[87]Edmondo De Amicis (1846-1908), Souvenirs de Paris et de Londres, trans. from the Italian by Mme. J. Colomb (Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1880), 192. Edmondo De Amicis was an Italian writer.

conclusion to his sequel. Nor would his novel stretch the parameters of the truth, for Zola went to great lengths to make sure that truth was respected.

La Débâcle is an epic story of the fall of the Second Empire. Its characters and plots assume secondary importance to the central theme of the army. Zola not only explained in this work why the war was lost, but he showed to a certain extent, how the next one could be won. In La Débâcle Zola attributed the cause of the war to the corrupt and licentious nature of the Second Empire. France, he said, had fallen behind the times, losing out in the race for scientific achievement. The country had been surpassed by the new Germany which had carefully applied the lessons of scientific progress to the re-organization of the German army. Strong discipline, morality and attention to national duty had built Prussian military strength. True, France had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians, but, in order to overcome the national sense of humiliation, the country would have to acknowledge Prussian dominance. In this idea Zola agreed with Ernest Renan that the victim should follow the role of the conqueror when it came to rebuilding the state.

In La Débâcle the characters represent different themes. The two leading personages, Jean and Maurice, each exemplify the two sides of France: the imperial past versus the republican future. At the conclusion of the book, the republican future annihilates the romantic imperial past; the

republic rises dramatically out of the ashes of the smoking capital to build a bright new future. The novel ends hopefully, with the clear vision of the new nation about to be born.

La Débácle is composed of three separate parts; each one contains eight chapters. Part one is devoted to actual defeats, the resulting chaos and confusion of the doomed French armies. Part two evokes the Battle of Sedan, while part three portrays the atmosphere of the prison camp on the Meuse River, going on to recreate the Siege and the civil war of the Commune in Paris.

In preparation for writing this book Zola made a special trip to the 1870 battlefields. He travelled to Sedan in a large carriage, equipped for writing and study, retracing the route of the ill-fated Châlons army. The difference was, of course, that Zola travelled in luxury whereas the army experience that he recreated had been made in abominable circumstances. In Sedan and the surrounding village battlesites, Zola interviewed survivors who had been present during the fighting. He studied endless maps and army veterans' diaries, from which he created over one thousand pages of notes that would become text.[88] His investigation was thorough, for he visited the primary sites as well as lesser known farms and inns along the battle route. He also

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[88]Rufener, Zola and La Débacle: Biography of A War Novel, 6.

made use of memoranda and documents received from people in all walks of life who had been involved in the conflict. On one occasion, in Paris, he was visited by the German writer, Conrad Alberti, who offered him a book on the German perspective of the Battle of Sedan.[89] Zola was happy to have it, commenting at the time that: "We are too indifferent toward everything non-French."[90]

On 1 September 1891, the twenty-first anniversary of the Battle of Sedan, Zola was invited to write a commentary about the 1870 war for the newspaper, Le Figaro. The article, which was really a preview of his forthcoming La Débâcle, stated that France had emerged from the national bloodbath of 1870 stronger and saner than before. The country had been sick in 1870, Zola wrote, inebriated by its past glories. Napoléon III had provided no leadership for France, being only interested in the preservation of his dynasty. Claiming that this was all now part of the national heritage, Zola called for national optimism, the force that had been responsible for the country's speedy recovery, so that France could openly face the truth about the 1870 disaster:

> Par une nuit de lune claire, je suis monté du fond de Givonne vers le plateau d'Illy suivant les chemins creux, traversant les champs, où dorment tant de nos morts. Et il m'a semblé que tous ces braves gens se soulevaient de terre, les fantassins frappés isolément derrière une haie, les cavaliers de l'héröique charge

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[89]Ibid., 8. Conrad Alberti was a German naturalist and writer.

[90]Ibid.

> tombés en masse, et que tous ils avaient la joie du sacrifice utile, de la grand moisson d'espérances qui germe aujourd'hui de leur sang.[91]

Whereas Zola's theme in La Débâcle was that war should be shown for what it really is, the France of 1891 still maintained a strong tendency to glorify the army. The love of military parades, of dashing uniforms and booming cannon was as present in 1891 as it had been at the onset of the mobilization in 1870. Zola described his purpose in writing the novel:

> We must no longer hide or excuse our defeat. We must try to understand and accept the awful lesson it teaches. A nation which survives a disaster like that may well be called immortal and, in the end, invincible. I should like the terrible story of Sedan to inspire in those who read it a robust new faith, and to be itself the call to our revival.[92]

La Débâcle, when published in 1891, was an instant success for Zola. Hailed as a masterpiece abroad, in France an enthusiastic press called the work a major literary event.[93] Public interest in La Débâcle was so great that the novel outsold all previous publications of the Rougon-Macquart series.

The military, however, did not share this positive conviction about the war novel. Subsequent events showed how well Zola had understood his countrymen when he said that its

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[91]Ibid.

[92]Émile Zola, quoted in Lanoux, Zola, 187.

[93]Rufener, Biography of A War Novel, 62.

publication would portray him as unpatriotic. His opinion proved astute, for the question of his patriotism played an important part in criticism of the novel in 1892. Much of the public censure about La Débâcle came from military officers, who claimed that Zola had wounded French national pride; the frightful drama of 1870 was not an appropriate subject for Zola's naturalism and romanticism.[94] He defended his work writing: "en écrivant ce livre, je crois avoir fait oeuvre de moraliste et de patriote."[95] Moreover, the history given in the novel is largely authentic. Zola, as this study has shown, had been present in Paris during the latter part of the Commune in 1871. He had gone to Père Lachaise cemetery the morning after the last of the Fédérés had been executed. The impression that such brutality left on his mind and his senses was not forgotten. In La Débâcle he clearly demonstrated the fanaticism both of the Communards and of the men of Versailles.

The question arises as to why Zola did not condemn the men of the Commune outright. True, he was never in favour of the Commune, but Zola could see no reason for punishing its leaders once the civil war was over. He called for clemency for these men and demanded their release from prison.[96]

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[94]Ibid., 64.

[95]Émile Zola, Le Gauloise, 20 July 1892, quoted in ibid., 63.

[96]Hemmings, The Life and Times of Émile Zola, 79.

Moreover, by 1891, Zola, wanting badly to be admitted to the Académie Française, feared insulting the more conservative element of that body. Possibly he thought that by creation of the two leading characters in La Débâcle, he could demonstrate that both the Communards and the Versaillais were equally wrong and responsible for the resulting carnage. His forthrightness in his past career and his willingness to express his ideas, even in times of danger, makes it difficult to agree that Zola would become hypocritical in the face of criticism. Whereas his situation was radically different in 1892 from what it had been in 1870, he still believed in truth and justice. Moreover, his coming role in the Dreyfus Affair would show how far he would go when his ideals were challenged. His novel was, however, timely. In the years 1886-89 the Boulanger crisis had created a new interest in the affairs of the army. Supporters of General Boulanger included both monarchists and Bonapartists. There was, once more, the possibility of a new "man on horseback" coming forth to lead the country into the same dangers from which it had tried to escape in 1870.[97] Some army generals felt compelled to write letters to newspapers accusing Zola of unpatriotic acts, charges that were later to be revived during the Dreyfus trial. Many people agreed with General du Barrail who wrote in Le Figaro that the book was "conceived with shocking spirit"

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[97]"The man on horseback" was a reference to Napoleon III.

and gave "to the events that crushed France a philosophical explanation which is false."[98]

La Débâcle was the second of the three times in his career that Zola was called unpatriotic. Existing evidence refutes this, for it was his very patriotism that was responsible for his being able to produce such a novel. In order to write La Débâcle he had to look directly at the 1870 situation from a distance in order to warn of future dangers. In doing so he proved himself a true prophet of the dramas that were to follow in the twentieth century. Far from being unpatriotic in 1870, Zola was a loyal Frenchman who did just what his conscience directed; often in personal danger, he never failed to carry out his own ideas. The same patriotism was to guide him through the Dreyfus Affair a few years later. He was, as Anatole France said in his graveside oration to the dead Zola in 1902, "a moment in the conscience of humanity."[99]

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[98]Elliott M. Grant, Émile Zola, 1966), 160-161.

[99]Anatole France, graveside oration to Émile Zola, delivered at Zola's funeral, 5 October 1902, quoted in Leblond-Zola, Emile Zola raconté par sa fille, 266.

Conclusions

The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 was officially ended by the Treaty of Frankfurt on 26 February 1871. The country's problems, however, remained unresolved because the war followed by the Siege of Paris, civil war and the Commune, left France more divided than before. The questions that arose after the disaster were much the same as the ones that had been raised in July 1870: What was the cause? How had France ever fallen into such a perilous state? Why was the country so easily overrun? In effect, many of the problems after the war were the same as before the conflict. The electric atmosphere of those uncertain days was conveyed in the following passage:

> January 1871: what did Frenchmen feel? The Germans occupied their country from the frontier to Saint-Denis and Vincennes, and their dishonoured capital still smelled of blood and smoke. Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Limoges, Périgueux were still armed and possibly primed to unleash a fresh explosion. Sadness, silence and stupor reigned everywhere. How was the order obtained by force to be fixed and stablilized? The precarious nature of the situation frightened people, and with the anguish and fatigue that they experienced was mingled a feeling of repentance.[1]

These questions prompted fierce debate in the early months of the Third Republic and continued long after it had faded into history. Some immediate answers were that France, in 1870, was ill-prepared for a war, the army was neither properly equipped or well-trained and lacked leadership. The

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[1]Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, The Third Republic From Its Origins to the Great War 1871-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.

moral state of France had degenerated, leaving the country introspective and unaware of the dangerous situation to which it was exposed. This introspective attitude prevented the government of the Second Empire from recognizing the growing Prussian menace on the eastern border. Moreover, there was no national feeling, no real patriotism around which France could successfully rally. The price demanded by the German victors was only one issue; once the indemnity had been paid, the conquerors withdrawn and the troubles of the civil war rectified, there was still one imperative task remaining: the question of a new constitution for France. The last German soldier left France in 1873, the same year that the former Emperor, Napoleon III, died in exile in England.[2] The death of the hapless Emperor was not, however, quite the end of the Bonapartes, for his father's demise left the young Prince Imperial as an appealing heir for many Bonapartist supporters.[3] Those who wanted a return of the dynasty did so for economic reasons; clearly plebiscitary dictatorship was

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[2]Napoleon III had been released from captivity by the Prussians in 1871 and went to England where he joined the former Empress Eugenie and their son the Prince Imperial. They bought an estate at Chislehurst, Kent where a court-in-exile was set up. The Imperial family was received by Queen Victoria and the British Royal family. Napoleon III wrote at Chislehurst and was said to be planning a return to France when he died in January 1873.

[3]Napoleon Eugène Louis Jean Joseph, the Prince Imperial (1855-1879). He was killed in action fighting with British forces in the war against the Zulus in 1879.

not yet exhausted.[4] Still others put their hopes in a return of the traditional monarchy. On 5 July 1871, the Comte de Chambord, legitimist Pretender to the Throne, issued a manifesto from his place of exile in Switzerland.[5] It proclaimed the white flag of the Bourbons to be the standard under which he would rule. The Comte, a mystical, remote figure, stated that: "the flag that hung over my cradle is the one I wish to shade my grave."[6] The other candidate for the throne, the Orleanist pretender, the Comte de Paris, tried to make a liaison with the future Henri V, but to no avail. The Comte de Chambord refused outright to make the Orléans prince his heir.[7] Thus in war-torn France after 1871, the main task of the new Third Republic was to try to secure public support of the country. The years following the defeat led to considerable soul-searching and agony on the part of French intellectuals. For Ernest Renan and Émile Zola, still in Paris after months of hardship, it was the end of one era, and the beginning of another.

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[4]Cobban, Alfred, A History of Modern France, vol. 3: 1871-1962, (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

[5]Frohsdorf, Switzerland.

[6]Comte de Chambord, Manifesto, 5 July 1871, cited in Cobban, A History of France, vol. 2: 1799-1871, 12.

[7]The Comte de Chambord was unmarried and had no heir. The Orléans pretender wanted to liaise with him so that the two houses would be joined and he would inherit the throne upon Chambord's death. Chambord refused this union and at his death in 1883 hopes for restoration of the monarchy died with him.

Ernest Renan left the country in 1872, returning later in the same year to resume his teaching. Never again would he become involved in politics. He had begun to develop the "detached pessimism" that characterized the last two decades of his life. Thoroughly disillusioned, he was still recovering from the trauma he sustained after the sordid actions of his German confrere, David Strauss. In 1883, he delivered his famous speech "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" at a conference held at the Sorbonne in Paris.[8] In Germany, after the war, some intellectuals had tried to legitimize the annexation of the two provinces, Alsace and Lorraine, by claiming that the concept of a nation rests on the twin imperatives of language and culture; the two provinces on the eastern French border therefore had a definite link to the German motherland. This concept was directly opposed to the fundamental French ideal of the rights of man. At the Sorbonne conference on 11 March 1882, Renan addressed the definition of nationhood: "Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel."[9] Two things, he stated, are responsible for constituting this principle: the past and the present. He continued, "L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer a

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[8]Ernest Renan, Discours et Conferences, (1882), quoted in Raoul Girardet, Le Nationalisme français 1871-1914 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 65-67.

[9]Ibid., 65.

faire vouloir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis."[10] A nation, said Renan, must make sacrifices, demanding common efforts.

Renan's speech at the Sorbonne, twelve years after the war, was a summation of his views about the causes that led to the 1870 defeat. The years had altered his thinking radically; in La réforme intellectuelle et morale he had severely criticized the notion of a democratic state, yet in 1882 he rallied around the republican concept of nationhood. His own thinking had evolved as had the new concept of patriotism and nationalism that arose in the first years of the Third Republic.

In 1890, following publication of L'Avenir de la Science, Renan's words and ideas became frequent in the speeches and writings of younger republicans: Ernest Lavisse, Charles-Victor Langlois, Gustave Lanson, Charles Seignobos and Émile Durkheim.[11] It was the beginning of a new generation of French republican writers and thinkers, who saw Renan as the hero of republicanism while invoking his name as the father of scientific experimentation.[12] After Renan's death in 1892, the government of the Third Republic used his new republican image when they took the opportune step of erecting a statue

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922); Charles-Victor Langlois (1863-1929); Gustave Lanson (1857-1934); Charles Seignobos (1854-1942); Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). Lavisse, Langlois and Seignobos were historians. Lanson was literary historian and Durkheim was a sociologist.

[12]Beirer, "Renan and his Interpreters," 386.

to him in Tréguier.[13] They turned the event into a national occasion with government leaders present at the ceremony along with the Renan family.[14] It quickly became a political and a media event because of conflict with the local Breton clergy, who protested vehemently against the glorification of "the greatest defiler of Christ, of the defrocked blasphemer who, like Judas, grew rich by betraying his God and who died in iniquity."[15] The government, however, seeing political advantage in the public dedication, took no notice of the clerical objections. Many criticized the move, saying that proclaiming Renan a hero of the Republic was a far greater desecration of the man than the Roman Catholic Church had ever tried to perpetuate.[16] In La réforme intellectuelle et morale, Renan had couched his criticisms of a republic in a rather hesitant and tentative way. The intervening years between 1872-1892 had made him recognize the value of a republic, for he increasingly demonstrated his confidence toward it. In 1890, the publication of the Goncourt Journal with its infamous account of the 1870 dinner at Brébant's

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[13]Ibid. 13 September 1903 was the dedication of the statue of Renan in the square opposite the Cathedral in Tréguier. A street leading to the area was named rue Renan.

[14]Ibid. Guests included republican leaders, Premier Émile Combes, and Georges Clemenceau. Other republican notables spoke at the ceremony, including Marcellin Berthelot and Anatole France.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., 387.

restaurant where Renan, Goncourt alleged, had made traitorous statements, renewed the controversy about Renan's patriotism.

Existing evidence a century later provides overwhelming proof Renan was not a traitor. There was, however, a basic misunderstanding about Renan's statements. His actual words and their meaning were misconstrued in light of his unabashed admiration for Germany. When France and Germany were at war in 1870, his remarks became further misinterpreted by accusations of unpatriotic behavior in the press. As this study has demonstrated, Renan's works are filled with references to the Germany of Herder, of Goethe and of Kant. His academic life was obsessed by the German example: the protestant work ethic, the ideal of nationhood and the education system adopted by the German state. In 1868 he had, unfortunately, even dedicated his Questions contemporaines to the German Crown Princess Victoria.[17] If all of these were not enough to seriously question his motives at the time of national crisis, after the 1870 defeat he repeatedly called on France to emulate German scholarship and model itself on the Prussian example, in order to ensure a quick recovery. Public reaction was sceptical, for the press in 1870-1871 demanded scapegoats. His lifelong love of Germany was quickly overlooked in the speculation that Renan considered the German oppressor morally superior to France. Although the public outcry died down after

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[17]Ernest Renan, preface, Questions contemporaines (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1868).

the war it was revived again in 1890. After Renan's death, the expressions of his esteem for Germany were manipulated and taken out of context in the twentieth century. For example, his words were exploited by French sympathizers of Nazi Germany during the German occupation of the country.[18] Thus has history evaluated Ernest Renan.

Renan had what can be termed, "intellectual hospitality."[19] He welcomed all intellectual ideas, no matter where they came from. Partisanship would have been unknown to him, for he much preferred vague concepts, rather than sharp, jarring ideas. It was this vagueness that gave rise to the misunderstanding that has surrounded his words in the century since his death. What should be emphasized when looking at his statements and his actions in 1870, is that Renan was a strange mixture of the past and the future: eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century scientific progress. The fact that he welcomed new ideas made him unfit for dogmatism, and hence for the priesthood. All his life he remained a dreamer and a romantic, qualities that did not make a good priest in Catholic nineteenth-century France. Renan recognized that and accordingly sought a lay career where he did not have to follow the restricted principles of dogma. He remained,

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[18]German occupation of France 1940-1944. In 1940, Abel Hermant exalted Renan as the forerunner of collaboration. In 1949, Louis Vié vilified Renan as the promoter of collaboration and Germanism, declaring him a traitor. Beirer, "Renan and his Interpreters," 376.

[19]Ibid.

however, essentially a priest, even if he did not wear formal clerical attire. His attitude and reactions were all tempered by his moral and intellectual outlook. This facet of his personality contributed to the basic misunderstanding surrounding his words and ideas in 1870.

There is also evidence that Renan's search for the hidden truth was influenced by a messianic complex. Of a fastidious nature, Renan held strong moral convictions, often viewing life as a masterpiece created by an artist. Life, he philosophized, was not real, but merely existed on canvas with a placid perfection.[20] Reflecting upon this idea, the reader of this study can refer back to Renan's own interpretation of his impassivity: he stated that it was a result of his background and early education. Furthermore, his immersion in Biblical lore that was a strong part of his academic background was certainly responsible for some of his lack of reality. There exists, therefore, a strong link between his romantic concepts about how life should be lived and his dreams about German idealism. Renan frequently attempted to remove himself from reality; it is possible that he saw himself as Jesus Christ, the perfect man, the man who follows the trail of truth all his life and suffers for his principles at the end of it. In the unnatural pale yellow pallor of the flames that he saw when he witnessed the burning of Paris, came his recognition of the end of the world and the emergence

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[20]Wardman, Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography, 25.

of a long awaited Messiah. It was the fruition of everything that he had preached, a divine justice appearing at the final disastrous moment in France's history.

Renan was bound by a strict moralistic attitude, one that made him perhaps the prisoner of truth, more than the knight who was searching for it. This strict moralism was encased in other restrictions: his narrow Breton upbringing, religious background and outlook on life. For these reasons, he honestly believed that everything could be resolved by book learning and intellectual discussion. Where he miscalculated was in thinking that other intellectuals agreed with him. Renan also found the attitudes exemplified by chauvinism and militarism repugnant; he failed to realize, however, that other intellectuals might not. For this reason, he could never understand the actions that motivated his German confrere David Frederich Strauss.

Renan, then, was impractical, egotistical and naïve, but he was not unpatriotic. A case may be made for his patriotism: had he not loved France intensely, he probably would have remained aloof from the 1870 situation, or gone into exile for the duration of the conflict. He might never have written La réforme intellectuelle et morale or Dialogues Philosophiques. His critics show a distinct intolerance in their narrow interpretation of his words. In fact, their intolerance serves to emphasize the basic tolerance that is fundamental to the man's character. He refused point-blank to

take sides in 1870, doggedly doing what he thought was best for France. If he rejected democracy for his country, he did so in the belief that France was a 'perfect jewel' and deserved only the best. In his mind the best political state would be a quasi-feudal monarchy. It is therefore, evidential, that the real meaning of Renan's words, cannot be narrowed down to a single objective. Thus when he shouted "Périsse la France" he did so with real horror that the country might be dragged into a real war of revenge that in his opinion was repugnant. Despite all attempts to twist and interpret his actions and words, he remained open-minded while his critics were not. He appears more as a victim of his own moral and intellectual background than anything else.

Renan and Zola, strangely enough, had much in common. They both grew up in small, provincial towns where both were much influenced by their surroundings. Each man had a strong attachment to his mother, and each lost his father at approximately the same young age. Each held a strong view of morality that he considered sacrosanct. It was in the context of morality that Renan and Zola differed.

Renan's morality was closely intertwined with that of his education. His narrow, ecclesiastical schooling in Tréguier was carried on formally in the Jesuit institution of Saint Sulpice. Later he attended the universities of Paris. Zola, on the other hand, had a conventional type of religious education. Baptized as an infant and raised as a Catholic, he

did not, however, feel piety; nor was this aspect of religion a part of his upbringing.[21] When he was young, his anticlerical and anti-religious feelings were made stronger by the antagonism he felt toward the imperial regime because of the wide divisions that existed between classes. He saw Catholicism as a force on the side of the ruling class that oppressed liberty and freedom of thought.[22] Religions created by man held no fascination for him. From the beginning of his career Zola was a radical: "Je suis un révolté, moi," he wrote.[23] His republican sentiments grew stronger after he went through an enforced period of destitution in Paris.

Another similarity between the two men was in their attitudes toward science. Zola, like Renan, recognized that the future of civilization lay in scientific progress.[24]

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[21]Much later in his life, Zola, who had by then renounced religion as corrupt, agreed to various Church rituals. His marriage in 1870 included a religious ceremony which he said he agreed to out of deference to his wife. His mother's death included a Church burial that he found odious but allowed out of respect to her memory. His children were baptized, a step which he permitted because of their mother's wishes. During the last years of his life he liked to go over scripture lessons with his children, but this was more in teaching them Biblical stories than in any religious context.

[22]Josephson, Zola And His Time, 116.

[23]Émile Zola, L'Événément, 20 April 1866, quoted in Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 59.

[24]In 1893 Zola wrote about Renan, in reference to the latter's publication of La vie de Jésus:

> Suddenly, overnight, [Renan's] face rose above France, with the terrifying profile of Antichrist. It was a sacrilege shaking Jesus on his cross. Renan was respresented, like Satan, with two horns

Zola, the arch republican and anticlerical, did not moralize in the same way as Renan. Still, he felt that France was rotting at the centre and he detested the licentious way of life that had existed under the regime of the Second Empire. Zola found a different medium from that of Renan; through his novels he was able to reach working people.

Zola's concept of morality, then, was opposite to that held by Renan. Zola saw the divisions between the wealthy class and the levels of poverty as immoral. It was morally corrupt, he felt, that one class could have riches while the majority of people were hungry and cold. He repeated this theme consistently in his journalistic articles before 1870 and in his later novels. Where Zola was similar to Renan, however, was in his adherence to the principle of truth. Zola was as strict in searching for truth as Renan was. Truth for him was a prerequisite: it was a fundamental part of his journalistic career and it was certainly basic to his work as

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> and a tail. The fright was immense, mainly among the clergy...Devout women crossed themselves and scared, naughty little girls by threatening them with M. Renan, while the freethinkers grew interested in this audacious mind and like to attribute gigantic proportions to him. He became the giant of negation, he symbolized science killing faith. If one adds that he was considered a defrocked priest, one completes the portrait of this rebellious archangel, a modern Satan, victor over God, eliminating God, with the weapon of the century. Émile Zola, Le roman éxperimental, (Paris: 1890,) 70, cited in Beirer, "Renan and His Interpreters," 381.

Ironically, Renan's La vie de Jésus had scandalized France in 1863 in the same way that Zola's J'Accuse would do in 1894.

a novelist. Demanding that the people know the truth, he insisted upon telling them, to the best of his ability, about the war, the civil war and the Commune.

Although both Renan and Zola approached the problem of patriotism differently, neither failed to do his duty in a time of national crisis. Renan thought that as an intellectual messiah he could provide moral leadership and counsel for the country. His method was similar to that of a priest who took his flock to task for not being moral enough. His concern for the people was real, but he reprimanded and reproved, thus showing himself for what he really was, an intellectual aristocrat. Zola's convictions about working-class people and his bond with them became stronger with the years.

In 1877 he published L'Assomoir, a novel about working men that brought him fame and wealth.[25] A respected novelist after this date, he remained essentially a man of the people. His personal situation as a popular writer allowed him to be heard effectively in the media by a greater number of people, but his objective remained the same as in the years leading up to 1870: he reported the truth. Why would he have risked financial ruin as well as destroying his growing literary reputation in 1870, when he could just as easily have looked the other way? There are two answers: he spoke the truth because his conscience demanded it and the war severely interfered with his literary career. Renan, however, suffered

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[25]Émile Zola, L'Assomoir in Oeuvres completes, tome III.

no real interruption to his career which, by 1870, was already well-established.

The difference between Zola and Renan, then, was also one of experience versus inexperience and middle age versus youth. Zola was not bound by book learning or religious training, but by his own conscience and personal view of morality. Renan, an already established figure during the war years, was disillusioned by the fact that those in power refused not only to take his advice, but didn't want to listen to him. He could not ever reach the people directly with his work La réforme intellectuelle et morale because it was too far over their heads. Whereas he reached them well with the popular work, La vie de Jésus in 1863, he failed to estimate correctly that the Church still held sway over the peasants of rural France. Renan, then, was a prisoner of his intellectual abilities, while Zola was not. Zola, the master storyteller, could provide vivid descriptions of life that most of France well understood, having lived the experiences themselves.

Both men reacted in the face of adversity. Renan wrote of the war situation:

> Plus notre patrie est malheureuse, plus nous devons nous interdire de la quitter. Certes l'individu, dans les conditions ordinaires et sans fortune, fait très bien de s'expatrier, ou pour mieux dire d'aller coloniser. Mais tel n'est pas notre cas; nous sommes des sujets particulièrement nécessaires à la patrie; nous avons bénéficié de ses institutions, de son passé de sa vieille gloire; nous sommes ses élèves, ses alumni; en quittant, nous la fraudons de l'avance de capital qu'elle a faite pour nous, même quand nous pouvons avoir plus d'un grief personnel légitme à formuler contre

elle.[26]

Zola went back to writing his novels and stories after the end of the Commune with alacrity: "He picked up his old manuscript of La Curée where he had left off."[27] Resuming his observations and methodical studies of characters and places necessary for his novels, he seemed to have no wish to consider his own war experiences: "The soul-shaking incidents of the past seven months left his interior self unchanged, untouched."[28] Yet, was this statement accurate? The man who had breathed passion and colour into his descriptions of the desecration of Paris during Bloody Week, who had described the incredible devastation that he had witnessed at Père Lachaise Cemetery the morning after the last of the Fédérés had been shot, could not have so easily forgotten the sickening scenes. Nor did he, for the scenes of battle and war were to emerge consistently in his writing. Zola, moreover, lacked real impulsiveness, so that when he returned home after the end of the Commune, he did not outwardly require time to absorb the shock of what he had seen. He was calmed by the reassuring presence of his pen with which he set out to write the record.

Whereas Renan thundered about divine justice and a war of

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[26]Ernest Renan, letter to Marcellin Berthelot, 19 April 1871, in Correspondance II 1847-1892, 404.

[27]Josephson, Zola And His Time, 176.

[28]Ibid.

revenge, Zola did no such thing. Shortly after the end of the Commune he wrote that the men who had been the leaders of the insurrection should be granted an amnesty.[29] He did not condemn them for their actions, for although he was always only lukewarm in his praise for the Commune, he understood its revolutionary nature and the ideals of its leaders. Zola, not moralistic in the same way as Renan, did not believe that long prison terms for these men would help the French situation. His attitude was that France must get on with the future. He would not intervene in public life again for two decades; when he finally did so, it would be a grand gesture that would mark him as a fighter for social justice. Indeed, the whole period of the war and its aftermath seems to have fired Zola with revulsion, rather than feeding his imagination or his desire for moral justice. He remained, in effect, a pacifist, dedicated to the cause of peace and a united Europe. His war record would be seriously challenged during the Dreyfus Affair. Stories circulated by his enemies in the 1890's claimed he had willfully refused active military service in 1870.[30] His republican statements, anticlericalism and his employment by radical newspapers during the war were all used against him later in order to portray him as a traitor.

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[29]Mitterand, Zola Journaliste, 152.

[30]Other stories in the French press in 1894 claimed that Francesco Zola had embezzled army funds. Zola did his best to clear his father's name, but most likely his actions were motivated by the fact that he bore the same name.

History has since cleared his name, but it should not be forgotten that little scholarly work was done on Émile Zola in France for decades.[31]

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[31]Zola revisionists began to research his life and works from the papers in the Bibliothèque Nationale in the 1950's. The next decade saw the publication of several new biographies and correspondence. From the late 1920's until after World War II there was little work done on Zola. The Nazis took every opportunity to call him a traitor. The work of French scholars Henri Mitterand and Henri Guillemin and that of British academic F.W.J. Hemmings resulted in new research on the author.

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