

Émile Zola

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Émile Zola



Born: April 2, 1840

Died: September 29, 1902 (aged 62)

Occupation: Novelist, Writer, Journalist

Nationality: French

Genres: Naturalism, Journalism

Émile Zola (2 April 1840 – 29

French

September 1902) was an influential French novelist, the most important example of the literary school of naturalism, and a major figure in the political liberalization of France.

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Biography

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More than half of Zola's novels were part of a set of 20 collectively known as Les Rougon-Macquart. Set in France's Second Empire, the series traces the 'hereditary' influence of violence, alcoholism, and prostitution in two branches of a single family: the respectable (that is, legitimate) Rougons and the disreputable (illegitimate) Macquarts, for five generations.

As he described his plans for the series, "I want to portray, at the outset of a century of liberty and truth, a family that cannot restrain itself in its rush to possess all the good things that progress is making available and is derailed by its own momentum, the fatal convulsions that accompany the birth of a new world."

Zola and the painter Paul Cézanne were friends from childhood and in youth, but broke in later life over Zola's fictionalized depiction of Cézanne and the Bohemian life of painters in his novel *L'Œuvre* (*The Masterpiece*, 1886).

Activism on behalf of Captain Dreyfus

He risked his career and even his life on 13 January 1898, when his "*J'accuse*" [1], [2] was

published on the front page of the Paris daily, *L'Aurore*. The newspaper was run by Ernest Vaughan and Georges Clemenceau, who decided that the controversial story would be in the form of an open letter to the President, Félix Faure.

"*J'accuse*" accused the government of antisemitism and of wrongfully placing the Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus in jail. The case, known as the Dreyfus affair, had divided France deeply between the reactionary army and church, and the more liberal commercial society. The ramifications continued for many years; on the 100th anniversary of Zola's article, France's Roman Catholic daily paper, *La Croix*, apologized for its antisemitic editorials during the Dreyfus Affair. Zola was a leading French thinker and his letter formed a major turning-point in the affair.

Zola was brought to trial for criminal libel on 9 June 1899, and was convicted on 23 February, sentenced, and removed from the Legion of Honor. He declared that Dreyfus' conviction and removal to a prisoners island came after a false accusation of espionage and was a miscarriage of justice. Rather than go to jail, he fled to England. But soon he was allowed to return in time to see the government fall.



Portrait by Edouard Manet
(1868)

The government offered Dreyfus a pardon (rather than exoneration), which he could accept and go free and so effectively admit that he was guilty, or face a re-trial in which he was sure to be convicted again. Although he was clearly not guilty, he chose to accept the pardon. Zola

said, "The truth is on the march, and nothing shall stop it." In 1906, Dreyfus was completely exonerated by the Supreme Court.

Zola died in Paris on 29 September 1902 of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a stopped chimney. He was 62 years old. His enemies were blamed, but nothing was proven. (Decades later, a Parisian roofer claimed on his deathbed to have closed the chimney for political reasons.^[1]) Zola was initially buried in the Cimetière de Montmartre in Paris, but

on 4 June 1908, almost six years after his death, his remains were moved to the Panthéon.

The biographical film *The Life of Emile Zola* won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1937. The film focuses mainly on Zola's involvement in the Dreyfus Affair.

In January 1998, President Jacques Chirac held a memorial to honor the centenary of *J'Accuse*.



Gravestone of Émile Zola at cimetière Montmartre; his remains are now interred in the Panthéon.

Quotes

"And Let us never forget the courage of a great writer who, taking every risk, putting his

tranquility, his fame, even his life in peril, dared to pick up his pen and place his talent in the service of truth." — Jacques Chirac

"The artist is nothing without gift, but the gift is nothing without work." -Émile Zola

"If you ask me what I came to do in this world, I, an artist, I will answer you: I am here to live out loud." - Émile Zola

[2]

"Zola descends into the sewer to bathe in it, I to cleanse it." — Henrik Ibsen

"Civilization will not attain perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest." — Émile Zola

"...but I affirm, with intense conviction, the Truth is on the march and nothing will stop it." — Émile Zola

Bibliography

- *La Confession de Claude* (1865)
- *Thérèse Raquin* (1867)

- *Madeleine Féral* (1868)
- *Le Roman Experimental* (1880)
- *Les Rougon-Macquart*
 - *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871)
 - *La Curée* (1871–72)
 - *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873)
 - *La Conquête de Plassans* (1874)
 - *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875)
 - *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876)
 - *L'Assommoir* (1877)
 - *Une Page d'amour* (1878)
 - *Nana* (1880)
 - *Pot-Bouille* (1882)
 - *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883)
 - *La Joie de vivre* (1884)
 - *Germinal* (1885)
 - *L'Œuvre* (1886)
 - *La Terre* (1887)
 - *Le Rêve* (1888)
 - *La Bête humaine* (1890)
 - *L'Argent* (1891)
 - *La Débâcle* (1892)
 - *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893)
- *Les Trois Villes*
 - *Lourdes* (1894)
 - *Rome* (1896)
 - *Paris* (1898)

- *Les Quatre Evangiles*
 - *Fécondité* (1899)
 - *Travail* (1901)
 - *Vérité* (1903, published posthumously)
 - *Justice* (unfinished)

Trivia

- The adjective "Zolaesque" describing Zola's writing was a key word in the finals of the 2005 American crossword puzzle tournament in Stamford, Connecticut, as documented in the film *Wordplay*.
- Émile Zola took photographs of the local area in Norwood, south London, where he stayed during his exile of 1898-99. "Emile Zola, photographer", ISBN 0-95-153843-8.

Footnotes

1. ^ Brown, Frederick (1995). *Zola, A Life*.
2. ^ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/if_you_ask_me_wl-i/173215.html

External links

- Works by Émile Zola at Project Gutenberg
- J'accuse ...! Émile Zola, Alfred Dreyfus, and the greatest newspaper article in history", by Donald E. Wilkes Jr. from *Flagpole Magazine*
- J'accuse by Émile Zola, In English and French
- (French) Biography, bibliography
- Émile Zola works: text, concordances and frequency list
- The Rougon-Macquart Novels of Emile Zola (for English-speaking Readers) provides an American enthusiast's introduction, insights and synopses.

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