

**OLIVIER LUMBROSO: Dans l'atelier de... Émile Zola** [In the atelier of... Émile Zola]

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Olivier Lumbroso is a professor of French literature at the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, whose literary research focuses on naturalism and the work of French naturalist writer Émile Zola. He is a member of the *Didactique des langues, des textes et des cultures* (Didactics of languages, texts and cultures) and a researcher at the *Institut des textes et des manuscrits modernes (ITEM, Institute of modern texts and manuscripts)* and at the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique/École normale supérieure* (National center for scientific research/École normale supérieure). He is also a director of the literary magazine *Cahiers naturalistes* on naturalism and a codirector of the *Centre d'étude sur Zola et le naturalisme* (Center for the study of Zola and naturalism) at ITEM.

Lumbroso's publication *Dans l'atelier de... Émile Zola* (2023) presents Émile Zola, one of the greatest French novelists of the 19th century and author of the three cycles *Les Rougon-Macquart*, *Les Trois Villes*, and *Les Quatre Évangiles*. Zola left to posterity thousands of pages of handwritten work, lyrical dramas, short stories, and chronicles. But he was not only a writer; he also left behind works as a photographer and an illustrator: in short, the world of archives. Lumbroso's essay, therefore, revisits the various aspects of Zola's work, some well-known, others much less so.

The book is divided into four chapters, each dedicated to a different aspect of Zola's writings and life. In the first chapter, "Les lieux de la création" (Places of creation), Lumbroso proposes to study the workplaces

of the writer "casanier": "Je suis un homme tout à fait casanier... Hors de mon nid, je suis fini !" ("I am a complete homebody... Outside my nest, I am finished!"); 11, trans. by T. G.). He begins the chapter by introducing important and decisive personal and professional events from Zola's life. Readers have an opportunity to discover Paris through the places where Zola lived and created (not only flats, but also cafés, friends' houses, conference rooms, etc.), as a result of his career evolution and social ascension. The author enriches the reading by adding the exact addresses, photographs of the interiors, and citations from Zola's novels and correspondence to establish the deeper links between his texts and personality. The chapter also encompasses Zola's beginnings as a writer and theoretician of naturalism, explaining his reason for choosing naturalism, his experiences with publishing houses, the purchase of his vacation house in Médan (where the Médan group was formed), not leaving out the period of exile. Among other things, the author also points out less well-known information: Zola's relation to photography, to collecting objects, and his literary meetings on Thursdays.

The second chapter, "Histoire d'une archive-monde" (The story of an archive world), refers to the abovementioned "world of the archive". Zola's pre-texts, manuscripts, photographs, journal articles and correspondence can be consulted on "Gallica" or on "Archiz", the portal of the ITEM's Centre Zola. Summarizing Zola's digitized texts accessible to the wider public, the chapter

serves also as a guide for students or researchers. The chapter also discusses the issue of reception of Zola's manuscripts and novels: the first reception from 1880 to 1890, the period of slow recognition of his heritage from 1902 until 1940, and the period from 1950, when Zola's masterpieces entered university literary research.

In the third chapter, "Dans le ventre des cycles" (In the belly of cycles), an allusion to the novel *Le ventre de Paris* (The belly of Paris, 1873; Eng. trans. *Fat and Thin*, 1888), Lumbroso, thanks to his extensive knowledge of Zola and naturalism, particularly from a genetic perspective, concentrates on Zola's process of writing the novels in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle and presents various elements that constitute preparatory files (so called *dossiers préparatoires* – extensive preparatory work-notes and research files for his novels). He also comments on the original manuscripts, the family tree, Zola's readings (Taine, Balzac, etc.) and points out the importance and richness of Zola's ethnographical and field research that became a crucial element of his naturalist project. Lumbroso explains as follows: "The ethnographic documentary material from the surveys is intended to become novelistic material" (144). The end of this chapter presents the cycles *Trois Villes* and *Évangiles*, showing the so-called "third version of Zola" ("Troisième Zola").

The fourth chapter, "À l'école de l'atelier" (At the school of the studio), Lumbroso reflects on the epistolary image of Zola ("image épistolaire"; 171) and asks if there is a relation between the genesis of the novels and Zola's correspondence, which becomes a tool to establish a better understanding of Zola's writing style and historical and political con-

text but also a witness of the writer's evolution. Epistolary research reveals how Zola decomposed his perceptions of city and society life and recomposed them into his texts, revealing much information that he wrote about in his letters: struggles with publishing houses, his arguments against antinaturalists, situations that marked his literary creation, his perfectionism in writing, but also the fact that he took on the role of mentor. The chapter also discusses the strategies that enable Zola to constantly reinvent himself. In the part "Le perfectionnement de l'atelier" (The perfection of his craft) Lumbroso states four dimensions of Zola's "autodidacticism" (186): unfailing discipline (rituals and writing habits), a taste for commentary developed at a very early age (many journalistic columns written mainly at the beginning of his career), constant self-evaluation, and finally "his didactics seeks to renew itself, and therefore to experiment" (191).

While the four chapters can be read on their own, regardless of their position within the book, they each give the reader an opportunity to encounter Zola from different points of view: as a collector of trinkets and painting (mainly from Manet, Cézanne, and Pissarro) but surprisingly, not as the owner of many books, as an architect of the text, and as an important moral and historical figure of the Panthéon. Lumbroso shows the lasting value and importance of Zola's texts today and encourages us to reread his masterpieces.

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