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## The Novel Map

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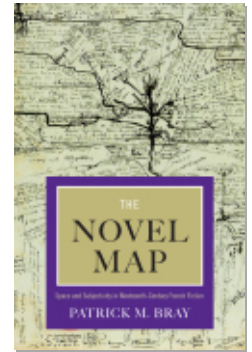
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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Mapping Creative Destruction in Zola

In the novels of the *Rougon-Macquart*, power resides in the ability to harness the destructive force of origins—of memory, of history, of heredity. In the beginning there was only the fateful “fêlure,” the crack that renders impossible a whole, univocal origin. The “fêlure” reproduces only itself as every successive generation invokes the authority of the origin’s secret, but the secret is that there is no one comprehensive or comprehensible origin. As the present moment unfolds in time it splits off from the past, differentiating itself from the origin; the past determines the future, but in unknowable ways. With the past irretrievably lost and the future indecipherable, the unattainable desire for the unity of a foundational beginning generates in turn a circular movement of thought that fantasizes the existence of an image capable of fusing past and future, of sealing the fissure at the center of the self. Artistic vision, genealogical tree, philosophical musing, scientific paradigm, financial swindle, or political ideology, whatever form this image takes it can project an original harmony only by displacing difference, which is to say locating the “fêlure” anywhere else than the origin.

The most potent incarnation of this fantasy, an archive functions as the site of an imagined origin, providing the illusion of a material foundation in a localizable space. An archive derives its authority from its capacity to memorialize; therefore it must acknowledge the inevitable deterioration of memory, while maintaining the promise to guard the remains of the past for a time in the distant future when its secrets can be read. Jacques Derrida traces the forgotten origins of the word “archive” as both “commandment” and “beginning,” stemming from “archontes,” the magistrates in whose home (“arkheion”) official documents were kept (*Mal d’archive*, 12–13). Documents held in the archive become part of the public record, but kept secret, classified according to a “privileged topology” (13). An archive governs from a site and commands by virtue of

silent or silenced documents, which are preserved so as not to be exposed to the outside and so that the outside is not exposed to them. As we have seen, Zola's *dossiers préparatoires* operate as a type of archive for the novels. The dossiers, Zola's record of his own writing process, safeguard his artistic development as a source of his legitimacy as author and show the fundamental truth that the novel escapes the author's control. The dossiers document the preparation behind the novels and amount to a treasure of ethnographic research, but also reveal how the novels diverge, sometimes radically, from their documented genesis.

The Rougon-Macquart family emerges from near the "Aire Saint-Mittre" as if surfacing from the cemetery to haunt Second Empire France. The founding member of the family, Adélaïde or Tante Dide, expresses the original "fêlure" first in her eccentric choice of husband, the peasant Rougon, and then her lover, Macquart. Her eldest son, Pierre Rougon, realizes early that to claim legitimacy and take hold of the family possessions, he must disinherit his younger half-siblings Antoine and Ursule Macquart. His mother's embarrassing madness incites Pierre to sequester her with his inconveniently republican nephew Silvère in what used to be Macquart's hovel. When Pierre gets advanced warning from his son Eugène of Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état, he easily manipulates public opinion and his brother Antoine's republican opposition, "saving" Plassans from disorder. During the uprising, Dide falls into a permanent catatonic state after watching her grandson Silvère's murder at the hands of a gendarme, and is sent by Pierre to spend the rest of her life at the Tulettes asylum. There Dide outlives at least sixteen of her thirty or so descendants, living in almost complete silence and dying in the final novel of the series at the age of 105. Witness to the terrible secrets of the family, Dide is carefully watched and locked away at a safe distance from Plassans. At the cracked origin of the family, she embodies the family's memory even while remaining incapable of speech, incarnating Rancière's "parole muette"; upon seeing her great-great-grandson Charles bleed to death from hemophilia, the original, awful memory of Silvère's murder returns and her final words before she herself dies are "Le gendarme!"

While the family's sordid beginnings obviously echo those of the Second Empire, "archive fever" spreads beyond the political realm to encompass every aspect of society. Archives must be visible signifiers of absent origins, while concealing the textual evidence of this original lack. Secret documents, concealed origins, and empty signifiers proliferate, granting control to those who claim to be custodians of knowledge, memory, and tradition. Eugène Rougon exemplifies the power of the new regime, but how he transformed himself from provincial petit bourgeois to imperial

minister stays shrouded in mystery; tellingly, the end of *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* finds him named “Ministre sans portefeuille” (“Minister without Portfolio”), as if his power increases when he no longer has a “portfolio” or official document detailing his specific responsibilities. A persistent trope in the series is the anonymous letter or blackmail note exposing an inconvenient truth or a threat: Florent’s police dossier full of anonymous letters in *Le Ventre de Paris*, Hélène’s anonymous letter to Henri accusing Juliette in *Une Page d’amour*, Mme Robert’s anonymous letters to Count Muffat exposing Nana’s numerous affairs, Séverine’s letter to Grandmorin in *La Bête humaine*. When documents or dossiers do become public, they lead to the downfall of their owner: Florent’s notes for a delusional plot to overthrow the government, Lazare’s disastrous or unfinished projects in *La Joie de vivre*, Père Fouan’s “donation entre vifs” (a sort of living will) in *La Terre*, Docteur Pascal’s research on heredity. Specific places in the novels materialize the spatial function of the archive by situating authority and concealing origins: the neutral territory of François Mouret’s property in *La Conquête de Plassans*, the enchanting garden paradise of the Paradou in *La Faute de l’Abbé Mouret*, Saccard’s palatial Banque Universelle in *L’Argent*. The archival source of the novels in the *dossiers préparatoires* threatens to overtake the narrative by the ubiquity of questionable documents. Instead of confirming that genetic and class origins circumscribe the fate of each character in a project that is both a “natural” and a “social” history, the novels (and their dossiers) question the very possibility of a knowable or legitimate origin, even as they assert the need for a stable foundation.

The omnipresence in the novels of the “cracked” origin and the archives that endeavor to contain it render an exhaustive study of this structuring principle impossible in one book chapter. Instead, in what follows I focus on how textual images, “novel maps,” project a synoptic view of time that attempts to encompass an illusory origin and an inscrutable future. Paris, setting for over half the novels of the *Rougon-Macquart*, inspires numerous attempts at a totalizing panorama, especially in the novel *La Curée*, for whoever can visualize the development of the city masters it. Yet a complete map of the city, in the novels and in the dossiers, proves elusive. The map or image overlying Paris hides the city’s social, geographical, and temporal fractures, while it gives to its beholder the impression of seeing into the future. Similarly, the genealogical tree drawn up by Pascal at the end of the series undertakes a complete description of the family across four or more generations, tracing the transmission of hereditary traits over time. An elegant figure illustrating years of scientific research, it becomes indecipherable with the destruction of Pascal’s papers.

### The Absent Map of Paris

The second novel in Émile Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart*, *La Curée*, describes the rapidly gained and ephemeral fortune of land speculator Aristide Saccard. Saccard owes his fabulous success to an intimate knowledge of Napoleon III's hand-drawn plan for transforming Paris. In a key scene in the novel, Saccard explains to his first wife, Angèle, Haussmann's incredible building project while overlooking Paris from Montmartre. The bird's-eye view of the city translates the map of Haussmann's urban plan into language. Saccard's panoramic vision of Paris takes the static spatial image of a map and puts it into motion, deterritorializing city space, like the flow of capital itself which exploits the inherent disjuncture between use-value and exchange-value. In the novel, speculation and creative destruction go hand in hand. The real estate speculator depends upon the fiction that he can control space and foresee the future, a control embodied in the image of a map. Zola's novel itself, I argue, attempts to ground the verbal and temporal instability of the literary text's origin in visual and spatial representations archived in the thousands of pages of his *dossiers préparatoires*. That Zola did not in fact include a complete map of Paris in his preparatory notes for the novel and that Haussmann did not in fact receive a map from Napoleon III prove that these maps are screens for the fear of the unchecked circulation of meaning, the "félure" at the origin of thought.

Zola's 1871 novel *La Curée*, contemporaneous with Sand's *Nanon* and usually translated in English as "The Kill" or "The Rush for the Spoil," portrays the parallel narratives of Aristide Saccard's pursuit of financial gain, or the joy of the kill, alongside the story of the semi-incestuous relationship his second wife, Renée, carries on with Saccard's son Maxime. This juxtaposition of crass materialism with sexual depravity underscores how the Second Empire eroded French society's moral foundation through what Sandy Petrey calls the "capitalization of humanity."<sup>1</sup> Money and human flesh circulate freely in the novel, crossing physical and moral boundaries. Renée is a stepmother who represents the absence of a mother, just as Saccard's financial transactions have little basis in the real estate he sells. Indeed, Saccard raises the money to realize his first scheme thanks to Renée's dowry; she is abandoned more or less with his consent to Saccard's son Maxime. The characters' loyalty to each other proves to be as changing as the market. In the end Saccard, as well as his son, return in another novel in the series, *L'Argent*, an even more explicit analysis of the workings of capitalism, while Renée withdraws to her father's mansion and dies.

Aristide Rougon begins the novel penniless but ambitious. Arriving in Paris with his wife, Angèle, after Napoleon III's coup d'état, he hopes to cash in on his brother Eugène Rougon's rise to political power. Eugène offers him an ostensibly low-level position working for the Hôtel de Ville as an "agent voyer" (a city surveyor), but on condition that his brother change his name. The newly minted "Saccard" (resonating with the sound of sacks of money and also one who sacks) quickly learns the intricacies of land speculation and eventually discovers the plans for the city's urban renewal projects. He concocts a simple but effective scheme to purchase property marked for demolition, inflate its value, and sell it for many times its worth:

Le plan de fortune de l'agent voyer était simple et pratique . . . Il connaissait son Paris sur le bout du doigt; il savait que la pluie d'or qui en battait les murs tomberait plus dru chaque jour. Les gens habiles n'avaient qu'à ouvrir les poches. Lui s'était mis parmi les habiles, en lisant l'avenir dans les bureaux de l'Hôtel de Ville.<sup>2</sup> (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 1:387)

Saccard knows Paris as someone who has studied it as a poor outsider, on foot through every neighborhood. Besides his methodical research of city space, what distinguishes him from his colleagues and superiors is his ability to read the future in the maps and documents scattered throughout the Hôtel de Ville: "Il en devinait plus long que ses chefs eux-mêmes sur l'avenir de moellons et de plâtre qui était réservé à Paris. Il avait tant fureté, réuni tant d'indices, qu'il aurait pu prophétiser le spectacle qu'offriraient les nouveaux quartiers en 1870" (1:387) ("He saw further than even his superiors into the future of rubble and plaster that lay ahead for Paris. He had rummaged about enough, pieced together enough clues, that he could foresee the spectacle offered by the new neighborhoods in 1870"). Saccard composes from seemingly unrelated bits of information a vision, a prophecy, of Paris fifteen or twenty years into the future. This fantastic vision, Paris as spectacle and object of speculation, has already altered how he looks at the present city, since he knows the fate of so many of its streets and buildings.

Saccard projects his imaginary map of Paris onto a view of the real city when he takes his first wife, Angèle, to dinner at a restaurant in Montmartre. Uncharacteristically romantic and tipsy, Saccard stares lovingly, not at his wife, but at the city, mesmerized by the play of light on the golden mist rising up between the Madeleine and the Tuileries (the imperial palace), which creates the illusion of gold falling on the rooftops. The giddy couple joke to each other that it is raining coins on the city.

This metaphorical vision of money recalls for Saccard his secret plan and inspires him to share it with his wife. The ephemeral, elusive golden mist reflecting immaterial light on the city rooftops evokes the paradoxical use of gold as immaterial abstraction, money or “universal equivalent,” and its more or less useless material essence as shiny metal.<sup>3</sup> Real estate (“biens immobiliers” or “immobile goods”) must too be abstracted from its materiality, put in motion, in order to convert it into money.

Just as atmospheric conditions lead to the fantastic vision of golden plunder, Saccard is able to transform a bird’s-eye view of Paris into a dynamic, moving image of the city over time, as buildings make way for roads and money falls into the pockets of speculators. Saccard anticipates the violence that will be done to the city by urban planners as he gestures with his hand:

Et de sa main étendue, ouverte et tranchante comme un coutelas, il fit signe de séparer la ville en quatre parts. . . . [then speaking to his wife] “Tiens, suis un peu ma main. Du boulevard du Temple à la barrière du Trône, une entaille; puis, de ce côté, une autre entaille, de la Madeleine à la plaine Monceau; et une troisième entaille dans ce sens, une autre dans celui-ci, une entaille là, une entaille plus loin, des entailles partout. Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons.”<sup>4</sup> (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 1:389)

Like Baudelaire’s book of prose poems, *Le Spleen de Paris*, which the poet claims can be chopped up into as many pieces as the reader or editor wishes in the image of the modern city, Paris here is mercilessly hacked up in the minds of speculators and the pickaxes of workers. As Saccard looks at the entire city from Montmartre, he destroys whatever organic vision he had of Paris, cutting open its veins to feast on the kill. The violent apparition of a Paris gashed, “fêlé” perhaps, by Saccard’s knife or workers’ shovels recalls how the Saint-Mittre cemetery was dug up in the vain hope of selling it to land developers, but also how the subsequent Aire Saint-Mittre concealed the murderous origins of the Rougon-Macquart family.

A few pages later, the reader learns why Saccard is so confident in his prophecy for the future of Paris and why he can see further than his immediate superiors:

Saccard s’était permis, un jour, de consulter, chez le préfet, ce fameux plan de Paris sur lequel “une main auguste” avait tracé à l’encre rouge les principales voies du deuxième réseau. Ces sanglants traits de plume

entaillaient Paris plus profondément encore que la main de l'agent voyer.<sup>5</sup>  
 (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 1:391)

Violating the sanctity of the archive, Saccard entered into Haussmann's office to sneak a peek at the map of Paris drawn up by the "august" hand of the emperor himself. The existence of this map guarantees that Haussmann's project is backed by the full might of the empire and that Saccard's vision of Paris represents the future. Moreover, the destruction of vast sections of the city will adhere to a creative, aesthetic, and ideological, albeit secret, plan. The majestic hand of the emperor guides Saccard in his quest for fortune—certainly a much more reliable one than the "invisible hand" of the market.

Zola relies in this passage on the story, spread perhaps most of all by Haussmann himself, that the emperor had drawn up a detailed plan for Paris's renewal, a plan that Haussmann only executed. In the second volume of his memoirs, Haussmann describes the moment when Napoleon III named him the préfet de la Seine and handed him an annotated map of Paris: "L'Empereur était pressé de me montrer une carte de Paris, sur laquelle on voyait tracées par Lui-Même, en bleu, en rouge, en jaune et en vert, suivant leur degré d'urgence, les différentes voies nouvelles qu'il se proposait de faire exécuter."<sup>6</sup> Though Haussmann's memoirs were published after Zola's novel, the image of a map marked up with different colors is strikingly similar. While Napoleon III did indeed form a commission to draw up a new plan for Paris based in large part on his uncle Napoleon I's plans at the beginning of the century, the commission was formed before Haussmann's appointment and proposed sweeping changes rather different than what Haussmann eventually carried out (or claimed that the emperor requested).<sup>7</sup> Historians have convincingly argued that Haussmann invented many details of his meeting with the emperor and that the map, at least in the form Haussmann describes, never existed; it was nothing but a legend no doubt invented by Haussmann to defend himself against his many critics.<sup>8</sup>

The invention of this imaginary map was also in keeping with the Second Empire's uneasy relationship to politics, secrecy, and capitalism. The empire attempted to control, or at least to project the image of control, over all aspects of society, from the military to the economy. Its inability to organize the military effectively is brilliantly illustrated by Zola himself with the second-to-last novel in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, *La Débâcle*. There, during the Franco-Prussian war, the army's officers are lost within France itself, never having been given maps of their own country but only maps of Germany: "On avait distribué à tous les officiers des



cartes d'Allemagne, tandis que pas un, certainement, ne possédait une carte de France" (5:472) ("Maps of Germany had been distributed to all the officers, while not one, certainly, possessed a map of France"). The empire's management of the economy was just as haphazard, vacillating between laissez-faire principles and the emperor's socialist antipauperism campaign. As David Harvey writes, "Economic liberalization . . . gradually undermined imperial power. The Empire was brought down just as much by capital as by republicanism . . . or worker opposition" (*Paris*, 88). For want of a map—of Paris, of France, of the economy—Napoleon III lost his empire.

It is possible to see in the legendary map Haussmann invented the desire to create a holistic image of modern Paris, after the destruction he unleashed with all of its competing, chaotic visions, as if knowing that a plan existed can retrospectively organize spatial meaning. Yet the second and third phases, or "réseaux" of Haussmann's plan relied on speculation from investors. His eventual downfall might be linked to his inability to harness the forces of speculation, to make the destruction adhere to his unified vision. T. J. Clark has argued in *The Painting of Modern Life* that capitalism works against a stable image of the city:

Capital did not need to have a representation of itself laid out upon the ground in bricks and mortar, or inscribed as a map in the minds of its city-dwellers. One might even say that capital preferred the city not to be an image—not to have form, not to be accessible to the imagination, to readings and misreadings, to a conflict of claims on its space—in order that it might mass-produce an image of its own to put in place of those it destroyed. (Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 36)

The Paris of modernity, born from urban planning during the First and Second Empires, nevertheless resists any image imposed on it. Instead, the city becomes itself a factory for producing images. I would argue that these images were neither the homogeneous bird's-eye views of the early part of the century, nor were they always the mass-produced ones Clark mentions, but rather heterogeneous, fragmented images in the works of poets like Baudelaire, painters like the impressionists, and eventually filmmakers like Godard.<sup>9</sup> While capitalism deterritorialized Parisian space by hacking it up and selling it piecemeal, the pursuit of a unified urban plan or map of the city paradoxically upsets networks of signs, speeding up the circulation of meaning, the proliferation of fragmented images.

Émile Zola's *dossiers préparatoires* for his novels show that a true panorama of Paris, a map of the city, was elusive, but that the city itself

reflected the productive tension in his novel between visual representation and textual creation. Given the importance of the dossiers' role in establishing the factual basis for his novels, one would expect there to be maps of the city of Paris, perhaps an old map from before 1853 or at the least a sketch of Haussmann's overall project. In the notes for *La Curée*, however, there is no such thing. Zola took notes about finance, land speculation, and Haussmannization in general. Zola even included four detailed drawings of the Hôtel Menier on the Parc Monceau, the model for Saccard's garish mansion, as well as a drawing of the hothouse, the symbolic center of Renée's incestuous relationship. But nowhere in the notes does Zola plan the scene when Saccard looks out over the city from Montmartre. The most iconic episode in the novel has no concrete basis in visual observation, outside Zola's own imagination and his personal experience of the city as if the city's dynamism can only be conveyed in a poetic image.

Paris plays a central role in many of the series' subsequent novels such as *L'Assommoir*, *L'Oeuvre*, and *Une Page d'amour*, and yet these all lack a panoramic image of the city. There are, of course, hand-drawn maps of the streets around certain neighborhoods, but no view of the city as a whole. In *L'Assommoir*, after Gervaise and the wedding party visit the Louvre and the Palais-Royal, they decide to climb up the Vendôme column for the magnificent view of the city—but the staggering height of the column gives the viewers vertigo (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 2:449–59). They look around the city, staring dumbly at the monuments, and then attempt unsuccessfully to see the wine merchant's where they will be eating later on, on the boulevard de la Chapelle, aptly named the “Moulin d'Argent” (the silver or money mill). The city's immensity, and the ignorance of its natives, render it impossible to take it in at a glance in a single image. The narrative describes a beautiful scene of a band of sunlight piercing through a gold-bordered cloud and reflecting off panes of glass, a sight similar, one imagines, to the one of money raining on the city in *La Curée*, but *L'Assommoir's* wedding party remains indifferent to the spectacle, unable to see Saccard's vision of the future. The top of the Vendôme column, with its statue of Napoleon I, may be at the symbolic center of the empire, but affords no perspective on the city.

The dossier for *L'Oeuvre*, the story of the painter Claude Lantier's battle to create life in art, as Zola described it, contains very detailed notes taken by Zola describing the view from Montmartre and the surrounding area at sunset in the month of April; according to Mitterand, the author consulted a map of Paris from 1860 (Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, 4:1377). The dossiers for the novel also contain a map drawn by Zola of

the Montmartre cemetery and its surrounding streets, as well as a photograph entitled “PARIS Panorama de la Cité” taken downstream from the Île de la Cité and showing, not the entire city, but essentially the quays.<sup>10</sup> It would seem as if Zola had prepared for Lantier to paint a panorama of Paris from Montmartre, an artistic rendering of Saccard’s speculative vision. Yet the novel itself does not contain this passage—instead, Claude obsessively paints the view of Paris from the quays, analyzing the view from below under ever-changing light conditions. Claude fails to capture time in the static images of his paintings, whereas Zola’s narrative, by giving up a stable “factual” representation of Paris, allows the work of time to transform his characters; as Kenneth Cornell writes, his panoramic views of Paris demonstrate “Zola’s talent for producing totality of effect from detailed descriptions” (Cornell, “Zola’s City,” 111).

Whereas Paris serves as a backdrop or as an object of speculative desire in *La Curée*, *L’Assommoir*, and *L’Oeuvre*, the city becomes something of a character in its own right in Zola’s novel *Une Page d’amour*. The novel’s narrative follows a Provençale, Héléne Grandjean, née Mouret, and her daughter Jeanne as they move to the very fashionable neighborhood of Passy, at the time not yet incorporated into the city of Paris. From her window in Passy, Héléne can look out and see all of Paris—each of the novel’s five chapters end with a view of Paris from a different season and time of day in a reflection of Héléne’s psychological state. Zola included in his notes for *Une Page d’amour* a photograph of Paris from on top of Saint-Gervais, which is to say from the exact opposite perspective of the city, as well as an engraving of a bird’s-eye view of Paris from a balloon over the Champs-Élysées, to the north of Héléne’s window (Zola, *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart*, 1:11). According to Zola himself in a later preface to the novel which responded to the many criticisms of the five descriptions of Paris as artificial, there is a different origin to the inspiration than any visual representation (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 2:1607–8). As a young man living in Paris, the view of the city from his window accompanied him, “immobile et indifférent” in all of his hardships; when he began to write novels he vowed to make Paris itself a character, or rather to have the city serve the role of a Greek chorus. Zola claims that his apparent “furor” of description was none other than a desire to create a symphonic and human story, where the city would reflect and heighten human emotion. As for his documentation, he took notes from the elevations of Passy but was dissatisfied with the view of the northwest of the city, where the new monuments of the Opéra and Saint-Augustin rose up out of a sea of nondescript roofs. Although his novel took place before the completion of the two buildings, he decided to include them in his de-

scription anyway, “succumbing to the temptation,” as he says, that these monuments could lead to a personification of the city, despite the anachronism. This rare concession to the apparent aesthetic unity of Haussmann’s Paris, despite Zola’s usual insistence on a strict adherence to facts, allows him to show the ever-changing aspects of the city over time, not as an organic image so much as a dramatic backdrop juxtaposed to his character’s state of mind.

Claude Lantier toils away at multiple paintings of the city, lost in the never-ending variations of city time and space. H el ene Grandjean sees the transformations of her own emotional life reflected and contrasted in images of the city as the seasons pass. Zola the novelist inscribes new monuments onto a vision of the city in his youth, creating an amalgam of times and spaces, and affirming the aesthetic over the factual. While no single map of Paris exists that can capture the modern city in a holistic vision, the city produces virtual maps of itself, images which correspond to no one moment in time and no actual, concrete view of the city. Saccard sees a vision of the immediate future as he gazes out a restaurant window in Montmartre. And of course Haussmann invents a map from the past that would serve as a foundation for the city of the future. Zola shows us that speculation as well as the creative destruction known as fiction writing both rely on the ability to see past, present, and future in the spaces of the modern city.

### A Figural Genealogy

There were at least four different stages in the conception of the Rougon-Macquart genealogical “tree” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1777). While in the beginning phases of planning the series in 1869, Zola composed a simple sketch of a family named “Richaud-David,” which became “Rougon-Machard” and eventually “Rougon-Macquart.” The family members of the first and second generations are already established, but the third and fourth generations are not filled in until 1870 and 1871. Some characters disappear from the tree never to appear in the novels, such as a “Camoin Mouret.” It remains a work very much in progress, covered in annotations and erasures. A second early tree later the same year completed more details related to dates and hereditary traits, but is still uncertain about the names of many characters and includes roughly half of the eventual members of the family (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1778–79). Only with the preparation of the first novel with its elaborate genealogical narrative did the essential details of the family take shape. Far from

being a blueprint laying out in advance the foundation and structure of the ten, and then twenty, novels, the genealogical tree provides inspiration and a fairly abstract idea of narrative possibilities, while at the same time adapting to the shifting needs of the project.

Included in the eighth book, *Une Page d'amour*, in 1878, the first published genealogical tree offered the reading public a succinct outline of the family and therefore of the seven preceding novels. More important, it also provided clues about the twelve novels yet to be published; for instance, Jean Macquart is described as a soldier (though he next appears in the novel about peasants, *La Terre*). In the note accompanying the tree, Zola justifies the publication of the document and establishes the parameters for interpreting it (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 2:799–800). It acts, first of all, as a guide for the reader, an index to help keep track of the numerous family members. The second reason for publishing it is purely promotional fabrication: “Je regrette de n’avoir pas publié l’arbre dans le premier volume de la série, pour montrer tout de suite l’ensemble de mon plan. Si je tardais encore, on finirait par m’accuser de l’avoir fabriqué après coup” (2:799) (“I regret not having published the tree in the first volume of the series, in order to show my whole plan right away. If I were to stall longer, people would accuse me of having fabricated it after the fact”). This third version of the tree was indeed fabricated after the fact, and not in 1868 as he claims, but the fiction of the dossiers and Zola’s naturalist method require scientific preparation before the composition of the novels, not a parallel unfolding. Moreover, by situating the project’s entire conception before the end of the Second Empire, Zola protects himself from the criticism of disguising depictions of current events and scandals under the veil of historical fiction.

The genealogical tree therefore reinforces the claims to scientific logic and historical objectivity set forth in the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon*. Because each member of the family inhabits a section of time (a generation), a social stratum, and a genetic variation, the author only has to plug in the coordinates in the resulting grid in order to produce a novel. Fiction becomes an experiment with logical results:

Depuis 1868, je remplis le cadre que je me suis imposé, l’arbre généalogique en marque pour moi les grandes lignes, sans me permettre d’aller ni à droite ni à gauche. Je dois le suivre strictement, il est en même temps ma force et mon régulateur. Les conclusions sont toutes prêtes. Voilà ce que j’ai voulu et voilà ce que j’accomplis.<sup>11</sup> (*Les Rougon Macquart*, 2:799)

Zola articulates the same paradoxical authorial remove and incredible will power in the avowed composition of the novels as he did in the preface and throughout the dossiers. Conveniently, he has constrained himself to doing exactly what he wanted to do all along. The tree is a source of strength and a limiting factor, focusing his attention and channeling his energies. Yet with the publication of the genealogical tree, at least in principle he adds another constraint, since any reader will be able to see how the future novels branch off from the tree.

Finally, Zola announces in his note for *Une Page d'amour* that he will include the tree one more time at the front of the last novel, *Le Docteur Pascal*, as well as in the body of the narrative. The tree sums up all of Pascal's research and the novel cycle as a whole: "Dans ma pensée, il est le résultat des observations de Pascal Rougon, un médecin, membre de la famille, qui conduira le roman final, conclusion scientifique de tout l'ouvrage" (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 2:799–800) ("In my mind, it is the result of the observations by Pascal Rougon, a medical doctor, member of the family, who will lead the final novel, the scientific conclusion of the whole work"). Just as the tree was the (fictional) source of the novels in 1868, it will be the scientific conclusion, the validation of the original hypothesis. The only rationale for not including all of the details Zola claims to have collected about the family, and that Pascal will expose at length in the final novel, is out of consideration for the reader, whose pleasure at discovering the various dénouements of the remaining novels must be kept intact, as he writes, "pour ne pas déflorer les épisodes futurs" ("in order not to deflower the future episodes"). Zola thus cleverly offers himself an escape route, since he had not yet planned out many of the novels to be written.

Various documents in the *dossiers préparatoires* for *Le Docteur Pascal* show the development of the tree from 1878 to 1893, when the final volume was published. Besides a copy of the tree drawn by Zola's wife Alexandrine, the dossiers contain extensive files on nearly all of the individual family members detailing their medical histories and professions, along with a list of the novels with each Rougon-Macquart who appears in them (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1562–64). One document of particular interest is an annotated copy of the 1878 tree, which records the changes to the original plan as the novel cycle closes (figure 4.3). As if pruning the tree, Zola marks which members have died ("mort" or "morte") and which continue to live ("vit") in 1874, when the last novel ends. Curiously, the family member most tied to the empire, Eugène, bears the ambiguous label "à Paris vivant défendant l'empire mort" ("in Paris liv-

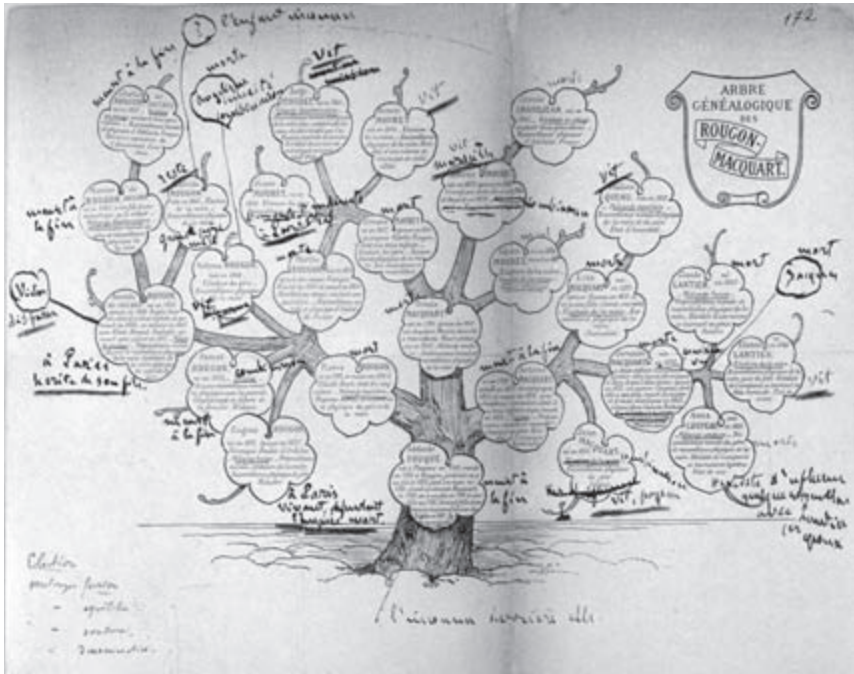


Figure 4.3. 1878 genealogical tree revised by Zola. Mss, NAF 10.290 folio 172. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

ing defending the dead empire”). New branches sprout (or perhaps are grafted onto the tree after the fact), such as Jacques Lantier (“mort”), son of Gervaise Macquart, who was invented for *La Bête humaine* years after Gervaise’s novel *L’Assommoir*. The most significant aspect in this transitional document is that for the first time the tree inscribes the unknown onto the text: Saccard’s illegitimate son, Victor, is labeled “disparu” (he disappears at the end of *L’Argent*); Clotilde and Pascal’s child, nameless and here sexless, is labeled “? L’enfant inconnu” (“? the unknown child”); below the “trunk” of the tree, buried in the ground under Tante Dide, are the words “l’inconnu derrière elle” (“the unknown behind her”). The desecrated cemetery of the Aire Saint-Mittre, with its mysterious past, finally appears on the tree, the family’s inscrutable origins extend beyond the madness of Adélaïde. Likewise, the fifth generation reintroduces uncertainty as the tree can no longer provide the key to deciphering the future of the anonymous child.

True to the promise he made in 1878, Zola plants the genealogical tree at the center of the narrative of the final novel. Pascal, like Zola, records

significant events in the tree as he closely follows the lives of his family members; Pascal's tree has the same graphic form as the one published with the novel:

C'était une grande feuille de papier jaunie, aux plis coupés par l'usage, sur laquelle s'élevait, dessiné d'un trait fort, un arbre symbolique, dont les branches étalées, subdivisées, alignaient cinq rangées de larges feuilles; et chaque feuille portait un nom, contenait, d'une écriture fine, une biographie, un cas héréditaire.<sup>12</sup> (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1006)

For the doctor, and perhaps for the novelist as well, it is the symbol and the summation of the piles of scientific dossiers. At the same time, Pascal acknowledges that it is a beautiful fiction, “où il n'y a pas un trou” (“without one hole”), that only works because it ignores the genetic input of the spouses (Mouret, Lantier, Quenu, etc.), the numerous other families who have been grafted onto the tree. It has its basis in reality, even if a selective reality, that confounds a simple mathematical logic, since genetics proves not to be strictly distributional; Charles, in the fifth generation, closely resembles his great-great grandmother Dide even though, as Pascal observes, he inherits only one twelfth of his genes from her (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1008). Full of scientific optimism, Pascal is nonetheless prudently skeptical about his own theories and the fumbling beginnings of the new discipline. Indeed, Pascal confirms what Zola's novels themselves demonstrate, that thinking through genetic origins and destinies belongs equally to the poet as well as to the scientist: “Il y a là [dans les sciences commençantes] une marge qui leur appartient [aux poètes], entre la vérité conquise, définitive, et l'inconnu, d'où l'on arrachera la vérité de demain” (5:1008) (“There is [in emerging fields] a margin which belongs to them [poets], between conquered, definitive truth and the unknown, from which will be torn the truth of tomorrow”). This poetic margin, between truth and the unknown, indicates, to those who know how to read it, the place where “solutions” are to be found (5:1008).

The tree's role as poetic text to be interpreted for possible solutions becomes clear later in the novel when Pascal himself scrutinizes it for answers. For over twenty years, the doctor carried on his research at a safe, objective remove from his subject, for he believed he was free of the family affliction, the “fêlure,” despite rumors that he is a half-crazed genius, “toute cette légende de génie à demi fêlé” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1119). The 1878 genealogical tree notes that he is “complètement en dehors de la famille” (“completely outside the family”). His obsession



with work, his growing fear that someone will destroy his dossiers, and his budding passion for his niece Clotilde provoke in him a paranoid state, which he fears to be the manifestation of inherited madness. Desperately, he interrogates the tree: “Il étala l’Arbre sur la table, il continua à le considérer longuement, de son air terrifié d’interrogation, peu à peu vaincu et suppliant, les joues mouillées de larmes. Pourquoi, mon Dieu! L’Arbre ne voulait-il pas lui répondre?” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1034) (“He spread out the Tree on the table, and continued to stare at it for a long time, with a terrified look of interrogation, little by little defeated and supplicating, his cheeks wet with tears. Why, my God!, wouldn’t the Tree answer him?”). He is only cured of his temporary madness after he is assured that Clotilde will not destroy the dossiers (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1043). The incident proves to him that his illness was only an accident (perhaps “archive fever”), and so heredity played no part; the tree could provide no answers but only act as a mirror to his paranoia.

After the moving scene of Pascal’s death, when he completes his own leaf and that of his unborn child on the tree, Pascal’s mother, Félicité, and his servant set fire to all the papers locked in his armoire in order to destroy the archive implicating the family in countless horrors. The only remains are fragments of paper, scraps where not one page is left completely intact. The tree, at Pascal’s bedside, survives despite Félicité’s feverish search for it (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1197), but his years of research, his data and theories, are lost forever. At the end of the novel, Clotilde contemplates the charred remains of the dossiers and unfolds the tree, lost in a daydream. Unable to make out much of anything, the words on the page instead recall memories and emotions. A vision comes to her in the form of a living family tree: “L’Arbre montait, ramifiait ses branches, épanouissait ses feuilles, et elle s’oubliait longuement à le contempler, à se dire que toute l’oeuvre du maître était là, toute cette végétation classée et documentée de leur famille. Elle entendait les paroles dont il commentait chaque cas héréditaire, elle se rappelait ses leçons” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 5:1216) (“The Tree rose up, extending its branches, unfolded its leaves, and for a long time she lost herself in contemplation, telling herself that the master’s entire work was there, the whole classified and documented mass of their family. She heard the words with which he explained every hereditary case, she recalled his lessons”). No longer a rigidly scientific document, the tree without its accompanying and explanatory dossiers becomes a deeply personal text, bringing back memories of Pascal and his work, though not his complete theories. The tree contains an image of the past, but also turns toward the future, reaching out its branches into the unknown with the young

children of the next generation, perhaps untouched by the family illness: “Et elle-même retombait à une rêverie, devant l’Arbre prolongeant dans l’avenir ses derniers rameaux. Qui savait d’où naîtrait la branche saine? Peut-être le sage, le puissant attendu germerait-il là” (“And she fell back into a daydream, in front of the Tree, which extended its last branches into the future. Who could say where the healthy branch would be born? Perhaps the long-awaited wise, great man would germinate there?”). The Rougon-Macquart genealogical tree records a long list of atrocities, madness, crime, and imbecility, but it also inscribes on the page the rejuvenating forces of life, the eternal hope for the new.

A comparison of the 1878 genealogical tree to Pascal’s definitive tree from 1893 (figure 4.4) illustrates the change of focus from origins to a concern about the future. The drawing for the 1878 tree very much resembles a traditional depiction of a tree: each family member has a label in the form of a leaf, and the earth at the tree’s base is shaded and in relief, extending out into the horizon. The branches are arranged naturally, with the result that some family members appear lower than their parents, as a tree extends its branches outward as well as upward. The legitimate Rougon side of the tree appears healthier than the Macquart side, reaching upward toward the top of the page. The 1893 tree, while still retaining “leaves” for each family member, becomes much more abstract. Branches extend far out horizontally and only go up. Each leaf lines up exactly with those from the same generation and is roughly the same size, regardless of the amount of information contained. The ground is much less developed and does not convey the sense of horizon, but blades of grass adorn what was once barren dirt. While still having fewer members than the Rougon side, the Macquart branches are just as healthy. Less “arborescent” and more “rhizomatic,” the Rougon-Macquart genealogy spreads outward in unpredictable ways, like blades of grass. Jean Macquart’s robust peasant children and Pascal and Clotilde’s nameless boy have equal chances for brilliance or decadence. The tree branches out and continually upward, drawing the eye to the top of the page and to the future.

The title in both cases is placed in the corner within a form reminiscent of a family crest. As a coat of arms, it bears only the words “Arbre généalogique des Rougon-Macquart,” and the name of the family is inscribed on a ribbon that is folded in on itself. If one were to imagine unfolding the paper, the names of each branch of the family would be on opposite ends, just as the two branches are split at their origin and their family members destined to occupy separate economic and social realms. The fold in the ribbon brings the two branches together, juxtaposed to each other on the page, but not repairing the original break, like the tree itself which

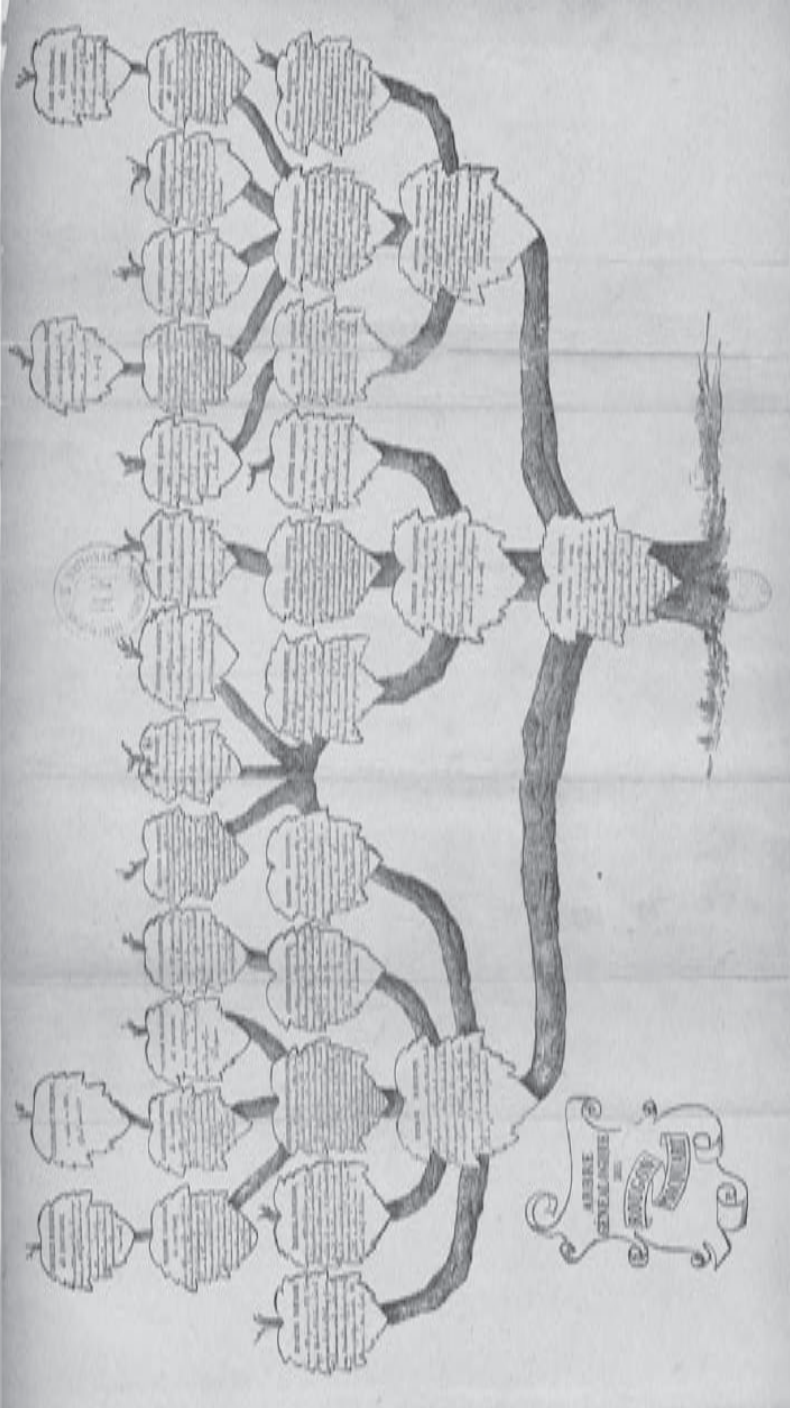


Figure 4.4. Definitive genealogical tree for the Rougon-Macquart. LLA, NQ-C-034532. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

points to a common though unknowable origin. The ribbon itself makes a vaguely circular movement as the Rougon, always on top, turns down to make the fold out of which the Macquart begin to ascend.

Even more than Saccard's mental map of Paris, one image in particular crystallizes the will to locate a simulated origin in the space of a text. The successive genealogical trees drawn up for the *Rougon-Macquart* fuse the "natural" history of the family to its "social" history in a single iconic representation, since genetic traits are inscribed alongside class markers across all social strata and four or five generations. Expanding as the family swells along with the number of novels, the genealogical tree, no matter how much it grows and changes, must continue its role as surrogate origin, documenting what little is known of the past while inventing what may exist beyond the immediate present. The explicit point of juncture of the *dossiers préparatoires* and the fictional narrative, the genealogical tree fantasizes an impossible synthesis of origin and termination, birth and death, cause and effect: it transforms a novel series into the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle.

