

Online Reviews

Thompson, Hannah. *Naturalism Redressed: Identity and Clothing in the Novels of Émile Zola*. Oxford: Legenda, 2004. Pp. 185. ISBN: 1-900755-82-3

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Hannah Thompson's *Naturalism Redressed* offers a well-researched reassessment of Zola's Naturalist project by considering the hitherto neglected place of clothing in the novels of the *Rougon-Macquart* series. Aside from its witty *jeu de mots*, Thompson's title delivers what it implies. *Naturalism Redressed* succeeds in its reappraisal of Naturalism as it has been defined by not only Zola himself, but also by previous critics, and in its demonstration of the pivotal role that sartorial issues play in the deconstruction of binaries that promote an essentialist vision in Zola's Naturalism. As Thompson shows, what may appear at first to be insignificant details regarding clothing effectively indicate that much more is at stake in dealing with a multitude of topics in Zolian novels, issues ranging from the body, to transvestitism, to the fabrics of the clothes themselves.

Written in five chapters, *Naturalism Redressed* addresses several issues pertaining to clothing in a broad thematic sense. Rather than providing a comprehensive study of all the references to clothing in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, Thompson focuses on a different theme concerning dress in each of her five chapters. In so doing, the author is able to treat issues that emerge throughout the entire series, drafting an impressive array of intertextual links and demonstrating a profound knowledge of the entire *Rougon-Macquart* saga.

In the first chapter, entitled "The Patchwork Text," Thompson views the *Rougon-Macquart* as a "texte-patchwork"; in other words, as a network of vestimentary signifiers that connote certain themes in multiple texts from the series. For instance, Thompson's examination of silk and satin in several novels confirms her argument that certain clothing items (or materials) reinforce particular themes, eroticism in this case, via the clothing network established by Zola in multiple novels from the *Rougon-Macquart*. In her second chapter, "Zola's Metaphoric Wardrobe," Thompson argues that clothing metaphors employed by Zola serve to trouble traditional binaries, causing a slippage with regard to notions such as naturalness and artificiality, to take just one example. "The Erotics of the Department Store," Thompson's third chapter, focuses mostly on the "transgressive sexuality" found in the department store in *Au Bonheur des dames*, which she argues challenges the procreative sexuality promoted by Zola's Naturalism. In this way, Thompson shows how Zola's investment in the decadent details of the fabrics worn by his characters actually defies the rigid social order that Naturalism proposes. Finally, in "The Dynamics of the Veil," Thompson argues that as much as the Naturalist text intends to "lay it all bare," the text actually remains quite "veiled," equally concealed as it is revealed by way of Zola's textual references to veils as well as the notions of being dressed versus undressed.

Naturalism Redressed provides a refreshing perspective for Zola studies, and will therefore interest any scholar seeking to deepen his or her understanding of a wide variety of topics in Zola's novels ranging from feminist issues, the body, sexuality, and the role of material culture in this author's oeuvre. With her book, Thompson successfully redresses Zola's Naturalist project by demonstrating the extent to which clothing operates as a metaphorical force throughout the *Rougon-Macquart* series.

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