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## "Maupassant and the Illusion of Reality" in Rethinking the Real. Fiction, Art, and Theatre in the time of Emile Zola

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## Maupassant and the Illusion of Reality

### *Résumé*

#### *Maupassant et l'illusion de la réalité*

*Plusieurs influences sont décelables dans l'œuvre de Maupassant -- du naturalisme au fantastique, avec parfois des traits romantiques, classiques, même décadents, et plus importante encore, l'influence de Flaubert. Au début de sa carrière, Maupassant s'allie au naturalisme de Zola, comme le montre sa participation au groupe de Médan et sa nouvelle, 'Boule de suif'. Mais il ne fait guère de distinction entre réalisme et naturalisme, parlant plutôt des "écoles de la vraisemblance". Les chroniques de Maupassant présentent l'essentiel de sa philosophie littéraire, et son essai "Le Roman" révèle le noyau de son esthétique: "J'en conclus que les Réalistes de talent devraient s'appeler plutôt des Illusionnistes." Cet article suggère que la multitude de voix qu'on entend chez Maupassant reflète son œuvre de maître illusionniste, œuvre s'adaptant à l'illusion de la réalité.*

Various influences are manifest in Guy de Maupassant's fiction, from naturalism to the fantastic, at times showing a propensity for classical, romantic, and even decadent values. But most important are the lessons learned from his mentor Gustave Flaubert. Critics have addressed the inherent paradoxes, summarized best by Pierre Cogny: "Maupassant ne pouvait être ouvertement ni réaliste, ni naturaliste, ni décadent, ni symboliste, du fait qu'il était inconditionnellement -- j'allais dire maladivement -- Flaubertiste."<sup>1</sup> Yet, this view gives only some indication of the multiplicity of Maupassant's writing. There is much more to consider, as Mariane Bury advises: "Plus on progresse dans la connaissance de cette œuvre de romancier, de nouvelliste, de chroniqueur, de poète, plus diverses se font entendre les voix maupassantiennes."<sup>2</sup> The present study proposes that the multitude of voices within Maupassant reveals the work of a master illusionist, adapting his writing in accordance with the illusion of reality itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Cogny, 'Maupassant, écrivain de la décadence?' in *Flaubert et Maupassant: Ecrivains normands*, ed. by Joseph-Marc Bailbé and Jean Pierrot (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), pp. 197-205 (pp. 204-05)

<sup>2</sup> Mariane Bury, 'Le Goût de Maupassant pour l'équivoque', *Dix-neuf/Vingt: Revue de Littérature Moderne*, 6 (Oct. 1998), pp. 83-94 (p. 83).

In addition to his fiction, Maupassant's essays and *chroniques* foster a better understanding of his literary philosophy.<sup>3</sup> A few are also pertinent for exposing his criticism of specific writers, including Emile Zola and fellow Médan group member Joris-Karl Huysmans. Early in his career, Maupassant endorsed naturalism, perhaps not as a school, but at least supporting Zola and the Médan group. With *Les Soirées de Médan*, he established his place in the group and in the eyes of the public as the most promising of the young writers following Zola. His promotional essay in *Le Gaulois* signals his adherence to the group and its purpose: "Nous n'avons pas la prétention d'être une école. Nous sommes simplement quelques amis, qu'une admiration commune a fait se rencontrer chez Zola, et qu'ensuite une affinité de tempéraments, des sentiments très semblables sur toutes choses, une même tendance philosophique ont liés de plus en plus."<sup>4</sup> This statement is most ironic coming from Maupassant, whose ties to the Médan group were the weakest and would soon dissolve altogether. He was often distant from the group, as he commented to Flaubert only months earlier, upon the premiere of his play *Histoire du vieux temps*, a comedy in verse: "*Sa bande* [la bande de Zola] me lâche, ne me trouvant pas assez naturaliste" (CEC p. 263). He went on to say that while "Zola et sa femme *ont applaudi beaucoup* et m'ont vivement félicité plus tard", the rest of Zola's "bande" ignored him: "aucun d'eux n'est venu me serrer la main après le succès" (p. 263).<sup>5</sup>

Maupassant's essay in *Le Gaulois* demonstrates his ability to embellish the truth for dramatic effect. He evokes an idyllic setting and a Boccaccian fashion of storytelling as the authors of *Les Soirées de Médan* supposedly took turns in sharing tales on summer evenings. That statement has been shown to be a fabrication, since plans for *Les Soirées de Médan* were likely plotted out in late autumn 1879 in Zola's apartment in Paris. Maupassant's fanciful account recalls the oral tradition of narrative and is far from espousing the naturalist objective of rendering *la vérité*. This invention seems all the more astonishing when juxtaposed with a letter to Flaubert in which Maupassant claimed that Zola proposed

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<sup>3</sup> Only a small portion of the *chroniques* are published in the 1938 volume associated with René Dumesnil's edition of the *Œuvres complètes* under the title *Chroniques, Etudes, Correspondance de Guy de Maupassant* (Paris: Librairie Grund, 1938). Therefore, I refer to this work, abbreviated CEC, solely for Maupassant's correspondence. For the *chroniques*, I consult instead Hubert Juin's three-volume *Chroniques* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> 'Comment ce livre a été fait', *Le Gaulois*, 17 April 1880, reprinted in Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Henry Céard, Léon Hennique, and Paul Alexis, *Les Soirées de Médan* (Paris: Le Livre à venir, 1981), p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> Italicized words within quotations come from the original text, here and throughout.

to publish a volume only after learning that Huysmans and Céard had already written stories on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 that would fit with his own: “Alors, il engagea Hennique, Alexis et moi à faire chacun une nouvelle pour compléter l’ensemble. Cela avait de plus l’avantage que son nom ferait vendre et nous donnerait cent ou deux cents francs à chacun” (*CEC* p. 273).

In further contrast to his idealized description of *Les Soirées de Médan* in *Le Gaulois*, Maupassant expressed hesitation about the work and about naturalism as a whole in another letter to Flaubert, coinciding with the volume’s release in April 1880: “C’est une préparation parfaite à mon volume de vers [*Des Vers*] qui paraîtra mardi et qui coupera court, en ce qui me concerne, à ces bêtises d’école naturaliste qu’on répète dans les journaux. Cela est la faute du titre *Les Soirées de Médan*, que j’ai toujours trouvé mauvais et dangereux” (*CEC* p. 286).<sup>6</sup> Maupassant’s hypocrisy toward naturalism is not entirely surprising, given his halfhearted association with the Médan group, the divergence from naturalism in his own writing, and the views he would later present about the illusions of literature in ‘Le Roman’ in 1888. Perhaps more telling is the disclosure that his involvement in *Les Soirées de Médan* was mainly for his own profit. His concern was not for the success of naturalism or the Médan group or even that of the volume and his short story within it. Instead, he was interested in making a name for himself with the intent to advance the sales and public reception of his volume of poetry and any future works.

Maupassant would become increasingly known for his reluctance to speak about literary topics over the next decade. In an interview with Jules Huret in 1891, he remarked: “Oh! littérature! monsieur, je ne parle jamais. J’écris quand cela me fait plaisir, mais en parler, non.”<sup>7</sup> Many therefore give priority to Maupassant’s private writings in estimating his attitude toward naturalism, especially his correspondence with Flaubert in which both authors mocked the grandstanding of Zola and his theorizing of naturalism. For instance, in a letter of 24 April 1879, Maupassant scoffed at the pretentiousness of Zola’s essay ‘La République et la littérature’ and called him “absolument fou” (*CEC* p. 267). Still, a good

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<sup>6</sup> These misgivings about the title were shared by Flaubert, who said that “le titre est stupide”. It is also believed that Flaubert turned down a request to take part in *Les Soirées de Médan* because he did not feel motivated by the subject. Nevertheless, the work bears the dedication: “A notre ami et maître, Gustave Flaubert.”

<sup>7</sup> Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire*, ed. by Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Corti, 1999), p. 203.

number of Maupassant's own works can be considered naturalist, such as 'La Maison Tellier' and 'Boule de suif'; even his fantastic tales may be evaluated as a test of the limits of naturalism. 'Le Horla', among other tales and journal articles by the author, reflects the fascination with the emergent field of psychiatric studies in the late nineteenth century. As Zola brought the newfound theories of Charles Darwin, Prosper Lucas, Hippolyte Taine, and, above all, the experimental method of Claude Bernard into naturalist literature, Maupassant likewise integrated what he learned from contemporary scientific studies. He also coincided with many naturalists in adopting a pessimistic view of life in response to the Franco-Prussian War, the general decline in society felt at the *fin de siècle*, and the philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer and Herbert Spencer. 'Boule de suif' is perhaps the best demonstration of Maupassant's treatment of the Franco-Prussian War and arguably the best of the *Soirées de Médan*. It was placed second, after Zola's 'L'Attaque du moulin', but in Zola's words, 'Boule de suif' was "certainement la meilleure des six, elle a un aplomb, une tenue, une finesse et une netteté d'analyse qui en font un petit chef-d'œuvre."<sup>8</sup>

While *Les Soirées de Médan* may be perceived as a manifesto of naturalism, as some of the authors themselves affirmed and critics have debated over the years,<sup>9</sup> one should not too hastily draw the conclusion that 'Boule de suif' is a good model of naturalism, nor that Maupassant fit the mould of the naturalist writer that Zola was trying to establish in *Le Roman expérimental*, also published in 1880. One may look to Maupassant's own observations in his 1888 essay 'Le Roman' as a retrospective view of the writer's mission. The central theme may be interpreted as an expression of his overall aesthetic: "J'en conclus que les Réalistes de talent devraient s'appeler plutôt des Illusionnistes."<sup>10</sup> Although Maupassant did not call himself an *illusionniste*, the term may be not only the most innocuous, but the most suitable. Whether through deliberate effort or circumstance, Maupassant maintained the illusion of being a true naturalist by publicly supporting Zola and other naturalists and by writing some works that were at least compatible with, if not grounded in naturalist theory. Moreover, Maupassant was something of

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<sup>8</sup> Emile Zola, 'Une Campagne', *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mitterand, 15 vols (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966-1969), XIV, 622.

<sup>9</sup> See Jennifer K. Wolter, 'The Médan Group and the Campaign of Naturalism' in *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Several Authors, One Pen*, ed. by Seth Whidden (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Guy de Maupassant, 'Le Roman', Preface to *Pierre et Jean*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), pp. 45-60 (p. 52).

an illusionist in the popular sense of a performer who is constantly changing the appearance of things, improvising, or presenting illusions. The arguments in his critical essays are often contradictory, partly because he was drawn to such equivocation, and aspects of his fiction create the illusion that he was a romantic, a classic, a decadent, a symbolist, and so on. In other words, Maupassant was beyond simply being a naturalist. Attempts at classification fail to describe adequately the artist who encompassed all these elements, a master illusionist if ever there was one.

The application of any label to Maupassant is a precarious undertaking, since he repeatedly stated his aversion to making distinctions between literary types when, in his view, all that mattered was talent: “Quant au genre de talent, qu’importe! J’arrive à ne plus comprendre la classification qu’on établit entre les Réalistes, les Idéalistes, les Romantiques, les Matérialistes ou les Naturalistes” (*Chroniques* II, 328). It is significant that this statement was made in a preface to Jules Guérin’s *Fille de Fille* (1883), a format typically used to assert literary beliefs, as in Zola’s preface to *Thérèse Raquin*. Though not referring to Zola specifically, Maupassant called that sort of apologetic preface “une espèce de sermon en faveur d’une religion littéraire” and declared having abandoned any former convictions: “J’ai eu quelques croyances, ou, plutôt, quelques préférences: je n’en ai plus; elles se sont envolées peu à peu” (p. 328). Despite his opposition to formal categorizations of literary theories, Maupassant did express his own aesthetic through the *chroniques*, his correspondence, and ultimately, in ‘Le Roman’, addressing such concepts as temperament and the mission of the artist, in relation to Flaubert and Zola.

Like Flaubert, Maupassant did not always differentiate between realism and naturalism, grouping works under the heading “écoles de la vraisemblance” in an 1882 essay (‘Romans’, *Chroniques* II, 40). His works have been linked to these schools, but Maupassant rejected the prescribed tenets of literary groups and their theories. In a revealing letter of 17 January 1877, he set forth his own “profession de foi littéraire” (*CEC* p. 223), well before *Les Soirées de Médan*. The letter is thought to have been addressed to Paul Alexis regarding a proposal for a literary manifesto, which Maupassant could not sanction: “Je ne crois pas plus au naturalisme et au réalisme qu’au romantisme. Ces mots à mon sens ne signifient absolument rien et ne servent qu’à des querelles de tempéraments opposés” (p. 224). He argued that the only criteria necessary for great literature are originality and beauty: “Soyons des

originaux, quel que soit le caractère de notre talent [...]. Tout peut être beau quel que soit le temps, le pays, l'école, etc., parce qu'il est des écrivains de tous les tempéraments" (p. 224). While this pronouncement echoes Zola's espousal of art as "un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament" (*Le Roman expérimental*), the letter also contains a criticism of the restrictions he found in naturalism's being but one manifestation of art rather than an open horizon, calling it as limited as the fantastic (p. 225).

Some important revelations of Maupassant's character and his relationship with Zola and the Médan group can be gleaned in this letter. Maupassant insisted with force: "Je ne discute jamais littérature, ni principes", finding that "parfaitement inutile" (p. 225). By the end of the letter, though, he seems to have found a perfect use for such discussions: "Si l'on faisait le siège d'un journal pendant six mois en le criblant d'articles, de demandes par des amis, etc., etc., jusqu'au moment où l'on y aurait fait entrer tout à fait l'un de nous? Il faudrait trouver une chose inattendue qui frapperait un coup, forcerait l'attention du public" (p. 226). The reference to mounting a concerted attack on a journal reinforces the notion of forming the Médan group in order to benefit the interests of the individual writers. As Maupassant put it, "A cinq on peut bien des choses" (pp. 225-26). He seemed to be in some sort of collusion with the other members of the group, as may be inferred from his request that "cette lettre ne doit pas sortir de notre *cercle*, bien entendu, et je serais désolé que vous la *montrassiez* à Zola, que j'aime de tout mon cœur et que j'admire profondément, car il pourrait peut-être s'en froisser" (p. 225). Exclusion of Zola from the circle may not, however, represent a duplicitous act. It may show instead a desire to respect the master by separating him from the pack or simply to spare his feelings. The dedication of Maupassant's *Contes de la bécasse* (1883) to the four other Médan disciples, but not to Zola, is similarly open to interpretation. Was it a subtle nod to Zola by not lumping him together with the others? or an attempt to keep a distance from the man and his doctrines?

It is clear that Maupassant wished to sustain the illusion of backing naturalism, at least to Zola. Notwithstanding his reservations about naturalism as a school or theory, he was a strong supporter of Zola the artist. As Huysmans had done five years before, Maupassant wrote an essay praising Zola's talents and offering a good deal of biographical information. The essay exists in two forms, with the first appearing in *Le Gaulois* in 1882 as a promotional tool for Zola's *Pot-Bouille*. The much-expanded second edition for the collection 'Célébrités contemporaines'

(1883) includes a more detailed analysis of Zola's works and theories. From the start, Maupassant associates the name of Zola with celebrity, invoking his polemics foremost: "Zola! quel appel au public! quel cri d'éveil! [...] jamais nom est-il mieux tombé sur un homme? Il semble un défi de combat, une menace d'attaque, un chant de victoire" (*Chroniques* II, 306). Maupassant had much to gain by playing up his association with Zola in order to make a name for himself. Aside from anecdotal sketches of Zola, he gave solid critiques of the *Rougon-Macquart* novels produced up to that point, focusing on *La Curée* and *Le Ventre de Paris*, as did Huysmans, more than the naturalist paragon *L'Assommoir*. Though he refers to Zola as the "maître naturaliste", Maupassant recognized the discrepancy between Zola's precepts and his writing. He cites Zola's romanticism as the root of a revolution within the writer, but one that was compromised. Calling Zola not only a "fils des romantiques", but "romantique lui-même", Maupassant points to Zola's grandiose style as the basis for inconsistency between his theory and practice: "Il porte en lui une tendance au poème, un besoin de grandir, de grossir, de faire des symboles avec les êtres et les choses. [...] Ses enseignements et ses œuvres sont éternellement en désaccord" (p. 314). For Maupassant, the impact of doctrines is negligible, as he insightfully reads the lasting poetic qualities of Zola's works, describing the *Rougon-Macquart* novels as "de la haute poésie" (p. 315). But he extracts one theory from Zola that is related to this thwarted reaction against romanticism: "Sa théorie est celle-ci: Nous n'avons pas d'autre modèle que la vie puisque nous ne concevons rien au-delà de nos sens" (p. 313). While romanticism reached for that which is beyond the immediacy of human senses, Zola professed to be occupied with concrete, observable phenomena. However, the "besoin de grandir" found in Zola's writing is at odds with this notion. The limitation of naturalist theory to the faithful representation of *la vérité* denies the exploration of things left to the imagination or the realm of possibility, a matter that Maupassant would investigate in his fantastic tales.

Maupassant's interpretation of Zola's theory here underlines recurring concepts found throughout his *chroniques*, such as realistic representation and the involvement of the artist's temperament in rendering that reality. Some scholars see in the *chroniques*, which number well over two hundred, the foundation of Maupassant's fictional works, referring to his journalistic activity metaphorically as the "laboratoire" where "tout se forge", according to Hubert Juin (*Chroniques* p. 15), and the "canevas" for a "préparation au gros œuvre futur", in one of the first studies of



Maupassant as a journalist.<sup>11</sup> These studies provide a means of entry into the investigation of Maupassant's works that had been largely ignored until André Vial led a revival of Maupassant scholarship in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> Mariane Bury attests to the progress made by subsequent researchers toward "la lente sortie du tunnel amorcée depuis la thèse d'André Vial", paying particular attention to the 1980s as a site for the reevaluation of Maupassant's novels, short stories, and *chroniques*, all of which demonstrate his entire *œuvre* as being "toute proche de notre modernité".<sup>13</sup>

Maupassant's first published *chronique*, which is one of the most instructive in defining his aesthetic, is devoted to Flaubert. His apprenticeship with Flaubert was a highly influential facet of his development that he would later describe in 'Le Roman': "Pendant sept ans je fis des vers, je fis des contes, je fis des nouvelles, je fis même un drame détestable. [...] Le maître lisait tout, [...] développait ses critiques et enfonçait en moi, peu à peu, deux ou trois principes qui sont le résumé de ses longs et patients enseignements" (p. 58). Maupassant's training under Flaubert sounds far more disciplined than any sort of relationship between Zola and the Médan group. The difference in approach between the two masters illustrates Zola's insistence upon equality. Zola swiftly raised Maupassant to a lofty status nearing Flaubert, while going on to laud Maupassant's dynamic temperament:

Il doit certainement beaucoup à Flaubert [...]. Mais il apporte une originalité propre qui perçait dès ses premiers vers, et qui s'affirme aujourd'hui dans sa prose; c'est une virilité, un sens de la passion physique dont flambent ses meilleures pages. Et il n'y a là aucune perversion nerveuse, il n'y a qu'un désir sain et fort, les amours libres de la terre [...]. Cela donne un accent très personnel de santé féconde et de belle humeur un peu hâbleuse à tout ce qu'il écrit.  
(*Une Campagne*, OC XIV, 622)

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<sup>11</sup> Gérard Delaisement, *Maupassant journaliste et chroniqueur* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1956), p. 13. For more on Maupassant's maturation through journalism, see Marie-Claire Bancquart, 'Maupassant journaliste' in Bailbé and Pierrot (pp. 155-66) and Anne de Vaucher, 'Théorie et pratique du journalisme chez Maupassant', *Berenice*, 8.19 (March 1987), 399-411.

<sup>12</sup> André Vial, *Guy de Maupassant et l'art du roman* (Paris: Nizet, 1954).

<sup>13</sup> Mariane Bury, 'Naissance d'un écrivain', *Dix-neuf/Vingt: Revue de Littérature Moderne*, 6 (Oct. 1998), 7-8 (p. 7).

This strong review reflects many of the qualities present in the young Maupassant, but ignores his darker side already evident in such early fantastic tales as ‘La Main d’écorché’ (1875) and poems like ‘Terreur’ (1876).

In the *chronique* ‘Gustave Flaubert’ (1876), Maupassant extols his mentor as a true artist, an “auteur impersonnel”, possessing not merely “son style”, but “le style”: “c’est-à-dire que les expressions et la composition qu’il emploie pour formuler une pensée quelconque sont toujours celles qui conviennent *absolument à cette pensée*, son tempérament se manifestant par la justesse et non par la singularité du mot” (*Chroniques* I, 20). This appraisal of Flaubert’s emphasis upon form (“chez lui, la forme c’est l’œuvre elle-même”) stands in contrast to Zola’s style.<sup>14</sup> Maupassant later compared the two in his *chronique* on Zola: “Son style large, plein d’images, n’est pas sobre et précis comme celui de Flaubert” (*Chroniques* II, 316). Yet, he would not discount Zola’s style, but rather acclaim its “hardiesse brutale” in the audacity of using popular language to write for the entire public and not only “les seuls raffinés”: “[Zola] n’a point besoin de toutes ces subtilités; il écrit clairement, d’un beau style sonore. Cela suffit” (p. 316). Clearly, Zola’s style in works such as *L’Assommoir*, cited here by Maupassant, is far removed from the contrived stylistics of Huysmans in *A rebours*. But it is significant that while Maupassant dismissed the need for “toutes ces subtilités” in Zola, he singled out the “style pénétrant et subtil” of Huysmans’s work at roughly the same time (‘Par-delà’, *Chroniques* II, 407). This apparent contradiction on matters of style is reconcilable in Maupassant’s understanding of the artist’s temperament and individual talent, as each writer has “son style”, which, as mentioned above, is distinct from his appreciation of Flaubert’s supreme style.

The mission of the artist is a vital component of Maupassant’s aesthetic. In his 1883 *chronique* ‘Les Audacieux’, Maupassant establishes the artist’s role in terms that echo Zola’s notion of the artistic temperament: “L’écrivain regarde, tâche de pénétrer les âmes et les cœurs, de comprendre leurs dessous, leurs penchants honteux ou magnanimes, toute la mécanique compliquée des mobiles humains; il observe ainsi suivant son tempérament d’homme et sa conscience d’artiste” (*Chroniques* II,

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<sup>14</sup> Recall that Zola ranked the matter of “forme” among the secondary points in his *Roman expérimental*, but that he also certified it as being sufficient for rendering a work immortal, commenting on the timelessness of “le spectacle d’une individualité puissante interprétant la nature en un langage superbe”. Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), p. 93.

280). The methodology of the artist's production would seem to be heralded in a similar fashion by both Zola and Maupassant, calling for observation filtered through the individual temperament of the artist. However, the implementation of this practice separated them. For Maupassant, a truly great artist must have the talent to attain "l'art littéraire", which he defined as more important than the other two elements of imagination and observation: "cette qualité singulière de l'esprit qui met en œuvre ce je ne sais quoi d'éternel, cette couleur inoubliable, changeante avec les artistes" ('Question littéraire', *Chroniques* II, 21). He went on to list those who demonstrated this "troisième don", ranging from Homer to the classics and the romantics and arriving at Gautier and Baudelaire. Such an inventory of the most gifted artists of all time brings to mind Zola's discussion in *Le Roman expérimental*,<sup>15</sup> but the distinction in Maupassant's analysis is the intangibility of this mysterious talent or genius. Both Maupassant and Zola allowed for the individuality of the artist, which Zola incorporated in his formula for representing nature "à travers un tempérament". Maupassant, though, went beyond the task of observation and even beyond the free reign of imagination to see in the work of the artist something mystical, escaping explanation, which can only be called "l'art littéraire".

In a later essay, 'La Femme de lettres',<sup>16</sup> Maupassant would attest to the stylistic superiority in the writing of all great artists, embodying a beauty of expression that transcends the basics of subject matter and the mere words employed: "L'artiste ne cherche pas seulement à bien dire ce qu'il veut dire, mais il veut donner à certains lecteurs une sensation et une émotion particulières, une jouissance d'art, au moyen d'un accord secret et superbe de l'idée avec les mots" (*Chroniques* II, 427). Maupassant granted writers a liberty of expression in ways that exceed Zola's naturalist doctrine. While Zola did advocate interpretations according to the artist's individual talent, Maupassant went further, surpassing a faithful representation to endorse a calculated arrangement of elements for beauty's sake. He wrote of the artist's pursuit of "cette force plastique des mots qui deviennent vibrants, vivants dans la phrase"; for example, the placement of a single word to achieve the desired effect (p. 427).

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<sup>15</sup> "Le naturalisme, assure-t-on, date des premières œuvres écrites" (p. 139). Zola proudly traced naturalism to Diderot, "le véritable aïeul des naturalistes", whose influence was carried through to Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and the Goncourts.

<sup>16</sup> The subject was George Sand, whose talents were praised by Maupassant in refuting Herbert Spencer's claim that any female artist must be abnormal, "un monstre dans la nature" (*Chroniques* II, 426).

Along with the insistence upon style or beauty of expression that separates Maupassant's aesthetic from Zola's, the vision of the world itself revolves around the concept of beauty. In his first *chronique* on Flaubert, Maupassant attributed to Flaubert the belief that the artist's mission is to "faire beau": "car, la beauté étant une vérité par elle-même, ce qui est beau est toujours vrai, tandis que ce qui est vrai peut n'être pas toujours beau" (*Chroniques* I, 20). Zola's take on the latter statement would likely be the inverse, that is, "ce qui est vrai est toujours beau". There is some validity in applying this reformulation to Maupassant as well, but only up to a point. Maupassant explained that "une chose très-laide et répugnante peut, grâce à son interprète, revêtir une beauté indépendante d'elle-même, tandis que la pensée la plus vraie et la plus belle disparaît fatalement dans les laideurs d'une phrase mal faite" (p. 20). Here again, emphasis is placed on form and style. Yet, in another *chronique* written only a few months later, Maupassant prioritized the subject matter and the search for beauty within even the most hideous things: "La beauté est en tout, mais il faut savoir l'en faire sortir; le poète véritablement original ira toujours la chercher dans les choses où elle est le plus cachée" ('Les Poètes français du XVIe siècle', *Chroniques* I, 36). Maupassant substantiated his assertion by invoking "la merveilleuse 'Charogne' de Baudelaire".<sup>17</sup> If this example is to prove that, according to the adage, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it also depends nevertheless upon the intervention of the artist, for the poem is not wholly true to life as an objective document, but rather a poeticized rendering of reality.

In Maupassant's estimation, "la vérité absolue" does not exist. This principle of his aesthetic differs significantly from Zola's naturalism. The notion of the artist's temperament, while shared by both writers, is firmly grounded in reality for Zola. Maupassant, on the other hand, states in his essay on Zola that "la vérité absolue, la *vérité sèche*, n'existe pas, personne ne pouvant avoir la prétention d'être un miroir parfait" (*Chroniques* II, 314). Certainly Zola did not make any such claim, but Maupassant, while stressing in Flaubert the artist's mission to "faire beau", demonstrates the fallibility of Zola's aim to "faire vrai" in what may be construed as a criticism of the experimental method:

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<sup>17</sup> Annarosa Poli examines in detail "le côté baudelairien" of Maupassant, which extends far beyond the modern quality of finding poetry in subjects customarily considered as repugnant. Annarosa Poli, 'Le Côté baudelairien de Maupassant', *Europe* 47 (June 1969), pp. 121-45.

Ainsi Zola, qui bataille avec acharnement en faveur de la vérité observée, vit très retiré, ne sort jamais, ignore le monde. Alors que fait-il? avec deux ou trois notes, quelques renseignements venus de côtés et d'autres, il reconstitue des personnages, des caractères, il bâtit ses romans. Il imagine enfin, en suivant le plus près possible la ligne qui lui paraît être celle de la logique, en côtoyant la vérité autant qu'il le peut. (p. 314)

This account of Zola's procedure of gathering material for his novels by means of documentation, often from secondhand sources, suggests that Zola himself was an "illusionniste". In 'Le Roman', Maupassant persuasively highlights the distinction between the two types of reality that tend to be confounded in naturalist literature. His comment could very well be applied to Zola: "Mais si nous jugeons un naturaliste, montrons-lui en quoi la vérité dans la vie diffère de la vérité dans son livre" (p. 49). While Zola's experimental methodology promoted the ideal of presenting reality with the least amount of alteration, Maupassant contends that in actuality, Zola's works were distorted, larger than life, following in the romantic tradition, and thus presenting a reality of his own invention.

In the end, the allowance for temperament acknowledged by Zola grows exponentially in Maupassant's conception of the artist. Maupassant arrives at a middle ground between Flaubert's "faire beau" and Zola's "faire vrai" in the central argument of 'Le Roman': "Faire vrai consiste donc à donner l'illusion complète du vrai, suivant la logique ordinaire des faits, et non à les transcrire servilement dans le pêle-mêle de leur succession" (p. 52). The artist's mission, then, is to "reproduire fidèlement cette illusion avec tous les procédés d'art qu'il a appris et dont il peut disposer" (p. 53). This prescription embraces both the artistic style of Flaubert ("les procédés d'art") and the truthfulness in representation championed by Zola ("reproduire fidèlement"), with the underlying foundation of Maupassant's belief that there can be only illusions of reality in art.