



**HAL**  
open science

# The Power of Tableaux Vivants in Zola: The Underside of the Image

Arnaud Rykner

► **To cite this version:**

Arnaud Rykner. The Power of Tableaux Vivants in Zola: The Underside of the Image. *Image & Narrative*, 2011, 12 (3), pp.98-112. halshs-00619079v1

**HAL Id: halshs-00619079**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00619079v1>**

Submitted on 5 Sep 2011 (v1), last revised 7 Oct 2011 (v2)

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **The Power of Tableaux Vivants in Zola: The Underside of the Image**

Arnaud Rykner

**Abstract:** Although they have already been the particular focus of scholarly attention, the series of tableaux vivants at the heart of Zola's *La Curée* (1871) still continue to fascinate and raise questions. Like any image constructed by means of a work of literature, "The Loves of Narcissus and Echo" draw upon several different interwoven discursive and iconic modes which both contradict and substantiate each other. Usually analysed solely for their narrative value (as a "mise en abyme" of the novel), these tableaux vivants provide much more than a mere thematic and structural framework. The eroticism of the performance and that of the associated textual witticism (which provides the link between the silent images and those words) is enhanced by the much more disturbing eroticism of a lurking image which is both denied and revealed through the dressing room scene, bringing the chapter to a virtual close. It is a far from attractive affair of under layers which is brought to the fore in this scene.

**Résumé:** Bien qu'ayant déjà fait l'objet de quelques études spécifiques, la série des tableaux vivants qui est au cœur de *La Curée* (1871) de Zola n'en continue pas moins de fasciner et de soulever mainte question. Comme toute image construite par le biais d'une œuvre littéraire, « Les amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo » sollicitent plusieurs logiques, discursives ou iconiques, qui s'entrecroisent, se contredisent, se renforcent mutuellement. Généralement analysés pour leur seule fonction narrative (comme « mise en abyme » du roman), les tableaux vivants proposent bien plus qu'un enchâssement thématique et structural. A l'érotique du spectacle, à l'érotique du « bon mot » qui accompagne celui-ci (et permet d'articuler l'ordre des images muettes à l'ordre du mot d'esprit), ils joignent l'érotique bien plus troublante d'une image occultée, à la fois niée et mise en avant par la scène du cabinet de toilette qui clôt quasiment le chapitre du roman : une histoire de dessous, tout sauf affriolants, qu'on tente ici de mettre au jour.

Keywords: Tableaux vivants, Mime, Eroticism, Hidden image, Zola (Emile)

The power of an image, especially one with a high erotic charge, cannot be gauged by what it shows (what we might call its degree of exposure); indeed, generally speaking here, the more that is shown the less we see. The image thus reveals its intrinsic irrepressibility, its manner of quite literally pushing up under visible icons and the commentaries which purport to explain or justify them. Emile Zola, art critic as well as stage or literary critic, knew this better than most. We are familiar with his passion for painting, especially the painters of his time, some of whom he would celebrate in exhibition reviews while others drew severe criticism. But less well-known is his taste for “pantomime” and “féerie” which he wrote about on more than one occasion.<sup>1</sup> He nearly considers the former as naturalist theatre at its most quintessential:

“It comes from the fact that the truth can only be shown, it cannot be told. [...] So let’s all do mime.”<sup>2</sup>

Although he would never turn his hand to mime, a large part of *La Curée* (1872) is devoted to its avatar, the *tableau vivant*, a veritable testing ground for ideas linking text and image. The second novel in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, *La Curée*, portrays Aristide Rougon, Eugène Rougon’s younger brother and tells the story of his social ascension during the urban reshaping of Paris under Hausmann. A shrewd yet shady businessman, Rougon has changed his name to Saccard so as not to compromise his vicar brother, but also because he likes the sound of his new name (“there’s money in that name; it sounds as if you’re counting five-franc pieces”<sup>3</sup>.) In addition, Saccard is very similar to the French verb “saccager” (to devastate). Zola often compared the partitioning of old Paris to an architectural massacre. The layering of names is also central to the plot (straw men are used to enable characters to cover

---

<sup>1</sup> “La pantomime” and “La féerie et l’opérette”, in *Le Naturalisme au théâtre*, Paris: Charpentier, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> “Cela vient de ce que la vérité peut se montrer et qu’elle ne peut se dire. [...] Faisons tous des pantomimes.” “La pantomime”. Edition quoted: Paris: Bernouard, 1928, 270.

<sup>3</sup> For quotations from Zola, Brian Nelson’s translation, entitled *The Kill*, published in 2004 and reissued in 2008 has been used with some slight changes from the translator. “il y a de l’argent dans ce nom là ; on dirait que l’on compte les pièces de cent sous.” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, vol.1. Paris : Laffont, 2002, 336).

up malpractice or legal actions), in the same way as the layering of images is one of the essential driving forces of the novel. In a striking echo of Racine's *Phèdre*, an affair of the heart involving Saccard's young wife, Renée, and Maxime, his own son from an earlier marriage, merges with the financial plot. The veneration of gold is thus linked to the veneration of the body, culminating in *The Loves of Narcissus and Echo* sequence. In it, Renée appears on stage half-naked with her lover and step-son, a crucial moment in this incest novel proving the power latent in an image - a distorted image however, appearing suddenly where it is least expected. The whole of chapter VI thus relies on the linkage between iconic and discursive modes, which incessantly confront and substantiate each other. Paradoxically, as we will see, they culminate in the emergence of an image which is simultaneously negated and emphasised, all the more powerful for its omnipresence, its invisibility; palpable yet hidden by the text which ostensibly set out with the aim of describing what is seen. The powerful image is thus not the one on show; rather it is the one at the centre of an imaginative pact based itself on a very real one, founded here as we shall see on property and financial speculation.

The art of the *tableau vivant* was not new in itself. Heir to the revolution in ideas epitomised by Diderot's *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, it was pivotal in the gradual passage from a textual to a visual culture or at least from verbal to spatial drama. It is a particular example of the "encounter between theatre and painting" ("la rencontre du théâtre et de la peinture") which was one of the driving forces behind "the revolution that overturned the classical system of genres" ("la révolution qui a bouleversé le système classique des genres") in Pierre Frantz's terms.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the *tableaux vivants* staged by the préfet Hupel de la Noue, more often than not analysed solely for their narrative value,<sup>5</sup> cannot be taken merely for their thematic and structural framework, for which they are usually celebrated. Through the medium of image, the three *tableaux* clearly convey the underlying dynamics of the diegesis: Narcissus refusing to give in to the power of love,

---

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> As a criticism of the frivolity of second Empire society or as a "mise en abyme" of the novel. On this last point, see Jacques Noiray, "Une 'mise en abyme' de *La Curée* : 'Les Amours du beau Narcisse et de la Nymph Echo'", *Littérature*, n°16, spring 1987, 69-77.

Narcissus refusing to cede to the lure of gold, and Narcissus punished by Venus and Plutus for not giving in to their power through his love for the nymph Echo. All three symbolise the main issues of the novel in a distortion of the original text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which is more grotesque than humorous. Through the subversion of bodies and the spilling of gold, the momentum of Paris under the Second Empire is brought to the fore.

Without going into more detail on their content<sup>6</sup>, it must be noted from the outset that, far from being clearly readable, they lie at the heart of a complex "representation device", pitting the old order against the new<sup>7</sup>, language against image<sup>8</sup>. This interweaving of levels (of representation in the strict sense of the term and commentaries on it, of contrapuntal witticisms and the images they conjure up) goes some way to depriving the performance of its primary purpose of showing, even exposing incest, rendering it almost meaningless. Ultimately, the more the text stacks up the under layers, exposing them to pitiless scrutiny (like the body of the marquise whose outfit is "a lot prettier underneath"), the more it obscures. As a result, the three tableaux through which Renée purports to publicly live out her forbidden love do not lead to any increased awareness among the onlookers, the husband who has been cheated on, nor society itself, despite the latter's being well-versed in debauchery. Everything points to the failure of the tableaux to fulfil their role of revealing the monster (after all, the original source for *La Curée* is patently Racine's *Phèdre*). Perhaps this is

---

<sup>6</sup> In the first chapter of *Tableau Vivant. Phryné, l'orateur et le peintre* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), Bernard Vouilloux sets them back in their aesthetic and social context. May I be forgiven also for referring to my contribution to the volume *Naturalisme et excès visuels: pantomime, parodie, image, fête*, edited by Catherine Dousteyssier-Khoze and Edward Welch (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2009): "Les fulgurances du corps muet: Zola, les tableaux vivants et la pantomime". Here I attempt a detailed analysis of the conjunction between the different levels of interpretation mentioned further down.

<sup>7</sup> The construction of a new capital on the ruins of the old one, but also of new ruling families on the ruins of old power centres: in the short breaks between tableaux vivants, a different drama to the one about love is played out. Saccard, his brother the Minister and the businessmen Mignon and Charrier, in the room together, divide up the spoils of Paris between them.

<sup>8</sup> While on stage, bodies are offered up to onlooking eyes, their voluptuousness heightened by the mythological setting, (here the prefect's text – commenting on the fable – covers up the image), the Marquise d'Españet's witty comment on her undergarments and what is beneath them spreads amongst the audience (the text brings forth the image behind the witticism): something inherently physical undercuts language, a sort of archaic undercurrent of primal desire.

because behind such monstrosity, which has been shown so much it has become invisible, another image rises up from the furthest reaches of the text. An added effect is thereby achieved which for the characters could be called the Purloined Letter syndrome, and for the reader a misdirection<sup>9</sup> device which Zola could have easily borrowed from the recently deceased Robert-Houdin who passed away in June 1871. Although we see the image and study it carefully, it is the wrong one. Thus within the erotic performance the writer actually incorporates the much more disturbing eroticism of a hidden image which forces its way to the surface in the dressing room scene at the close of the chapter. Unlike in the proverb, in painting what you see is not what you get.

To understand the reversal that occurs at the end of this sequence, we need to go back to that other tableau Zola provides us with, one which is much more “alive”, far more terrifying and which ultimately undermines the soothing tableaux preferred by imperial society, the only tableau, incidentally, which is truly powerful because it has become practically subliminal. Having learnt of the imminent marriage of her step-son and lover, Renée tears the latter away from the frenzy of the ball which had followed the performance. She drags him into her dressing room, swearing to admit everything in public if he doesn’t follow her. Once there, she signs the deeds of secession to the Charonne land in order to obtain the hundred thousand francs from her husband that she believes will allow her to flee to England with Maxime. While she feverishly embraces the latter, Saccard arrives unexpectedly, immediately realises what has happened but prefers not to reveal anything. He does not utter a word, too pleased to have secured the sought-after land at such a low price. The signature of the deeds thus symbolically covers up the act of incest with all the modesty of a veil. In the most supreme of insults, he leaves arm-in-arm with his son. Shamefully abandoned in such a manner, Renée looks at herself in amazement:

“She caught herself in the high wardrobe mirror. She moved closer, surprised at her own image, forgetting her husband, forgetting Maxime, quite taken up with the strange woman before her. [...] Who had marked her like that? Her husband had not so much as raised his

---

<sup>9</sup> Diversion or misdirection is the action through which the conjuror diverts the attention of the audience by showing them something ostensibly insignificant in order to more effectively carry out an act of substitution or manipulation which in turn becomes invisible.

hand. [...] She looked down, and when she saw herself in her undergarments, and in her light gauze blouse, she studied herself, lowering her eyes and blushing suddenly from time to time. Who had stripped her naked? What was she doing there, indecently displaying her nakedness to the waist? She no longer knew. She looked at her thighs, rounded out by her undergarments; at her hips, whose supple outlines she could trace under the gauze; at her breasts which were barely covered<sup>10</sup>.”

In a dazed and dishevelled state (“Her yellow hair, pinned up at the temples and at the nape of her neck, seemed naked and obscene”), having been both given up and undone, the naked Renée is left more defiled than ever before:

“She knew now. It was they who had stripped her naked. Saccard had unhooked her bodice, and Maxime had undone her skirt. Then, between them, they had torn off her shift. [...] They were cowards. They had stripped her naked. She recalled how, on one single occasion, she had read the future, on the day when, before the whispering shadows of the Parc Monceau, the thought that her husband would corrupt her and one day drive her to madness had come to her and disturbed her growing desires<sup>11</sup>.”

Thus defiled once and for all by Saccard and his vow of silence over the incest, Renée is both naked and in disarray having been sullied by both men. In the wake of blatant and

---

<sup>10</sup> “Elle s’aperçut dans la haute glace de l’armoire. Elle s’approcha, étonnée de se voir, oubliant son mari, oubliant Maxime, toute préoccupée par l’étrange femme qu’elle avait devant elle. [...] Qui donc l’avait marquée ainsi ? Son mari n’avait pas levé la main pourtant ? [...] Elle pencha le front, et quand elle se vit dans son maillot, dans sa légère blouse de gaze, elle se contempla, les cils baissés, avec des rougeurs subites. Qui l’avait mise nue ? que faisait-elle dans ce débraillé de fille qui se découvre jusqu’au ventre ? Elle ne savait plus. Elle regardait ses cuisses que le maillot arrondissait, ses hanches dont elle suivait les lignes souples sous la gaze, son buste largement ouvert [...].” (Les Rougon-Macquart, vol. 1. Paris: Laffont, 2002, 517)

<sup>11</sup> “Elle savait maintenant. C’étaient ces gens qui l’avaient mise nue. Saccard avait dégrafé le corsage, et Maxime avait fait tomber la jupe. Puis, à eux deux, ils venaient d’arracher la chemise. [...] C’étaient des lâches. Ils l’avaient mise nue. Et elle se dit qu’une seule fois elle avait lu l’avenir, le jour où, devant les ombres murmurantes du parc Monceau, la pensée que son mari la salirait et la jetterait un jour à la folie, était venue effrayer ses désirs grandissants.” (Les Rougon-Macquart, 2002, 519)

meaningless incest, a rape ensues which is all the more brutal for its going unsaid, a rape which of course conjures up the memory of the man to whom Saccard owed his fortune (as in order to pocket his future father-in-law's money, Saccard shouldered the blame for another, thereby fictitiously giving Renée back her lost virginity).

How then does Zola stage and sculpt this effect?

When reading the previous descriptions of all those paintings that Zola knew so well, those he sharply criticised at the time come to mind. Renée stripped naked by Saccard is of course Phryne, the courtesan exposed to the lecherous gaze of her judges (us?). It is the Phryne that Jean-Léon Gérôme had painted eleven years earlier<sup>12</sup> (Illustration 1), the one the Second Empire liked to ape in tableaux vivants (Illustration 2) which would rival those of the prefect Hupel de la Noue, described by Pierre de Lano soon afterwards:

“Firstly there was a mythological scene with the huntress Diana surrounded by nymphs who aroused the admiration of the audience at Court. In an extremely subtle arrangement and against a skilfully painted backdrop, Diana could be seen with a dozen young women close by, listlessly arranged in different poses, a few well-placed leaves concealing their total state of undress, while at the same time highlighting their figures sculpted in fitted silk undergarments. And then Venuses could be seen coming out of the waters, groups which imitated the major statues found in parks and museums, a whole procession of undressed beauties, an entire display of carnal splendour, nothing less than the apotheosis of desire and sensuality; and in a softer touch, Daphnis and Chloe, Phryne before her judges; and a few biblical scenes<sup>13</sup>.”

---

<sup>12</sup> On Phryne and the painting by Gérôme, see Vouilloux, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> “Il y eut tout d’abord une scène mythologique, une Diane chasseresse entourée de nymphes, qui provoqua l’admiration du public de la Cour. Diane, dans un décor habilement broché et dans un arrangement très subtil, parut ayant auprès d’elle ou disséminées et alanguies en des attitudes diverses, une douzaine de jeunes femmes, dont quelques feuillages savamment préparés voilaient le trop complet déshabillage, tout en faisant valoir leurs formes moulées en des maillots de soie. Puis ce furent des Vénus sortant de l’onde, des groupes reproduisant les principales statues des parcs ou des musées, tout un défilé de beautés dévêtues, toute une exposition de splendeurs charnelles, comme l’apothéose du désir et de la volupté ; et dans une note plus adoucie, Daphnis et Chloe, Phryné devant ses juges, ainsi que quelques scènes bibliques.” Pierre Image & Narrative, Vol 12, No 3 (2011)



The same unsettling similarities can be found in *The Slave Market* which would preoccupy Jean-Léon Gérôme (Illustrations 3 and 4) and appeared with Phryne at the 1861 Salon:

“She was ashamed of herself, and contempt for her body filled her with dull anger towards those who had left her like this, with only gold bangles at her wrists and ankles to cover her skin<sup>14</sup>.”

“Now she stood there without a strip of clothing, with gold bangles, like a slave<sup>15</sup>.”

The likeness is so striking that we are tempted to ask ourselves if, in an astonishing reversal, it is not Zola that the painter copied in the two roman slave paintings completed twelve years after *La Curée*. Here the slave is shown from both the front (Illustration 5) and back (Illustration 6), humiliated and defiled in the same way Phryne had been before. Everything seems to point to the fact that, despite the severe criticism found most obviously in “Nos peintres au Champ-de-Mars”<sup>16</sup>, Zola was influenced by Gérôme, even dismantling his paintings so as to put them back together<sup>17</sup>, replacing the cold tone of the painter, clearly discernable in Hupel de la Noue’s grandiloquent tableaux, with that “rare vigour” and

---

de Lano, *Les Bals travestis et les tableaux vivants sous le Second Empire*. Paris: H. Simonis Empis éditeur, 1893, 31.

<sup>14</sup> “Elle avait honte d’elle, et un mépris de sa chair l’emplissait d’une colère sourde contre ceux qui la laissaient ainsi, avec de simples cercles d’or aux chevilles et aux poignets pour lui cacher la peau.” (Les Rougon-Macquart, 2002, 517.)

<sup>15</sup> “A présent, elle se trouvait sans un lambeau, avec des cercles d’or, comme une esclave.” (Les Rougon-Macquart, 2002, 517)

<sup>16</sup> An article which came out in *La Situation*, 1 July 1867 where the comment on *Phryne before the Areopagus*, (1861) can be found.

<sup>17</sup> While on the subject, we can note that after Saccard creeps up on her, Renée “kept her rigid frame and vow of silence”, a vow that Diderot and Degas regretted could not be seen in neither Baudouin nor Gérôme’s Phryne (see Bernard Vouilloux, *Le Tableau vivant, Phryné, l’orateur et le peintre*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002, 200 and 245. The author refers to the “Zola moment” in his commentary on Gérôme’s Phryne).

“extremely powerful hue” Zola so admired in Manet<sup>18</sup>. Equally, it is not hard to see in the description of Renée’s state as this girl “indecently displaying her nakedness to the waist”, more than just a hint of Courbet<sup>19</sup>. The slightly vapid academicism through which the tableaux vivants ultimately conceal incest gives way to the “immense brutality<sup>20</sup>” that the Institution desperately attempts to cover up but which art alone can portray.

But what is particularly striking in this depiction of Renée’s almost appalling nudity is that we eventually glimpse Saccard’s last and most compelling success. In reducing his wife to an image, that of a naked slave who is both dishevelled and silent, he reclaims the inner order of the tableaux for himself. It is through the silence of the body that meaning is conveyed throughout the chapter. Renée made an attempt at it by staging herself in the three tableaux of *The Loves of Narcissus and Echo* “for the unconventionality of publicly giving herself up to Maxime<sup>21</sup>”. But it is Saccard in the solitude of the dressing room who reaps all the rewards. For this final tableau is well and truly the work of the man who deprives Renée of her unsettling power in three sentences illustrating his refusal to acknowledge the incest. Unable to escape her status of an image, prevented from speaking out<sup>22</sup> (the only means of recovering

---

<sup>18</sup> “Edouard Manet. Étude biographique et critique”, an article which appeared in *La Revue du XIXe siècle*, 1 January 1867, taken up in Mes Haines, *Mon Salon* in 1879. Edition quoted: *Écrits sur l’art*, Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 107.

<sup>19</sup> Incidentally we might ask ourselves which way – literally – indecency “to the waist” should be read: from top to bottom, as implied by the legend of Phryne, or from bottom to top, as in *The Origin of the World* (Illustration 7) or *Woman with White Stockings*. B. Vouilloux recalls that the “memory of Lesbos” with which the second painting is tinged, conjures up *The Sleep*, “that explosive painting by Courbet which was the talk of the 1866 Salon”; crucially, Valérie Bajou refers to this same painting adding: “The parted thighs convulse like the legs of the stag in *La Curée* [the 1856 painting that Zola would necessarily have had in mind when writing his own book]” (Paris: Adam Biro, 2003, 350). But what strikes me in particular, is that even if the prefect’s tableaux vivants certainly activate a web of cultural references, they turn out to be incapable of investing them with potency.

<sup>20</sup> “Edouard Manet. Étude biographique et critique”, 107.

<sup>21</sup> “[...] pour l’originalité de s’offrir à Maxime en public.” (*Les Rougon-Macquart*, 2002, 520.)

<sup>22</sup> What Renée does first to prevent Maxime escaping her grasp is to erase incest as an image, which the society is patently too disposed to ignore, but to put it into words: “If you refuse, I’ll go down to the drawing room and shout out that I’ve slept with you and that you are cowardly enough to marry that hunchback.” (*Si tu refuses, je* *Image & Narrative*, Vol 12, No 3 (2011)

a veritable existence, albeit scandalous), Renée poses no threat. As a portrayal of raw reality, out of reach of language, the image is comforting once again, something that Zola coveted in mime, a genre capable of anything because it operates in silence. But at the same time, the tableau vivant invests it with added performative power as the woman's transformation into a tableau is also the realisation of Saccard's manipulative fantasy. He is able to freeze her as a painting or statue, or even a ridiculous doll, a mirror image of the one that Renée finds in the loft of her childhood just before her death, another image of herself which will remain forever lifeless.

“In a corner, amid the silent despair, the neglect lamented by the silence, he found one of her old dolls; all the bran had flowed out through a hole, and the porcelain head continued to smile with its enamelled lips, above the limp body which seemed worn out by doll antics<sup>23</sup>”.

Ultimately, woman's reduction to an icon allows the burial of the Thing that Saccard refuses to acknowledge as an object (objectification is impossible without language). Even rewritten with naturalist brutality, the image is pared down to its bare meaning and, in a final reversal, the written word itself recovers a subversive power it had previously been denied. Thus in linking discursive and iconic modes in a multi-layered representation device, Zola does much more than describe and denounce a hypocritical, unfair society. He shows that the latter wins out through its ability to make images its own and continuously renew the sordid foundations on which it is built. In contrast, the writer triumphs through his ability to incessantly bring back these foundations through representation, bringing society face-to-face with the looming abyss which continuously threatens it, “a bluish square of emptiness” left by the “clear opening” of destruction (497), the “bluish hole” curtained off by intimate space and through which Love seems to laugh at infamies committed or suffered (439), a “gaping hole looking

---

descends dans le salon et je crie que j'ai couché avec toi et que tu es assez lâche pour épouser la bossue.” (Les Rougon-Macquart, 2002, 514. Saccard's attitude puts swift pay to that impetus.).

<sup>23</sup> “ Dans un coin, au milieu de ce désespoir muet, de cet abandon dont le silence pleurait, elle retrouva une de ses anciennes poupées ; tout le son avait coulé par un trou, et la tête de porcelaine continuait à sourire de ses lèvres d'émail, au dessus de ce corps mou, que des folies de poupée semblaient avoir épuisé.” (Les Rougon-Macquart, 2002, 538)

down over the bowels of the globe” via Plutus’s cave in the second tableau (497), the “gaping hole” of the little staircase (516) by which Renée sees Saccard and Maxime disappear, carrying away her secret so it can be well and truly buried forever.

These holes fashioned by desire emphasise Zola’s contribution over and above other writers before him, the searing way in which silent physicality surges forward through his intricate interweaving of text and image. Despite its being systematically concealed by names, and despite those names being systematically concealed themselves, this physicality has irrepressible force, not only via heredity (which laughs at name changes and is passed on physically) but also through the distinctive way in which Zola constructs complex representation devices which play on the instability of images. More than ever the powerful icon is the one which pierces the screen intended to support it, the one which bursts out of the casing which was meant to contain it, the casing of stage, bedroom and the body.

Arnaud Rykner is Professor at the University of La Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III and an honorary member of the Institut Universitaire de France. He headed the research group LLA CREATIS (Creation, Research, Emergence in Art, Text, Image and Performance, <http://lla-creatis.univ-tlse2.fr/>) at Toulouse-Le Mirail University until June 2011. After working on silence in theatre and on the interactions between literature and painting and theatre and photography, he currently co-runs a research program on the tableau vivant and staged photography. He has published several monographs with Éditions du Seuil and Éditions José Corti (including *L’Envers du théâtre* in 1996, *Paroles perdues. Représentation et faillite du langage* in 2000, and *Pans. Liberté de l’oeuvre et résistance du texte* in 2004) and a number of collected works (including *Pantomime et théâtre du corps*, with the Presses Universitaires de Rennes, in 2009). His primary research interests lie in the work of Maurice Maeterlinck, Nathalie Sarraute (who he co-edited for the Pléiade edition) and Marguerite Duras (whose plays he has edited for the paperback edition). He has also published around sixty articles on the theatre, European literature and visual studies.

Email: [arnaud.rykner@neuf.fr](mailto:arnaud.rykner@neuf.fr)



Illustration 1: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Phryne before the Areopagus (1861)  
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Painting exhibited at the Salon in 1861 and reviewed by  
Zola in « Nos peintres du champ de mars » (1867)



Illustration 2: Phryne ; tableau vivant at the Tuileries.  
Water colour by Léon Lebègue, for Pierre de Lano, *Les Bals travestis et les tableaux vivants*  
sous le Second Empire, Paris, H. Simonis Empis éditeur, 1893.

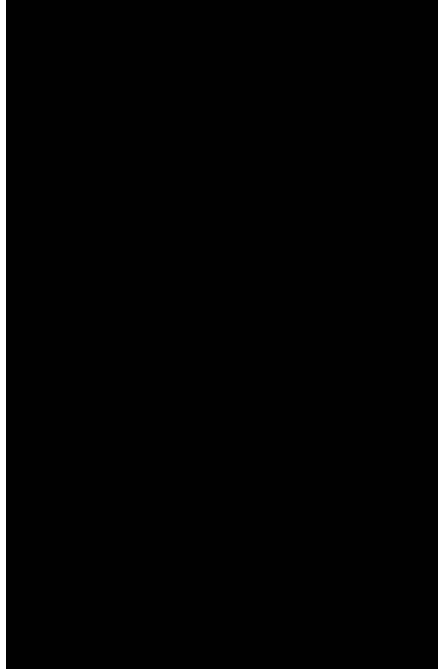


Illustration 3: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Purchase of a Slave (1857)  
Special collection.

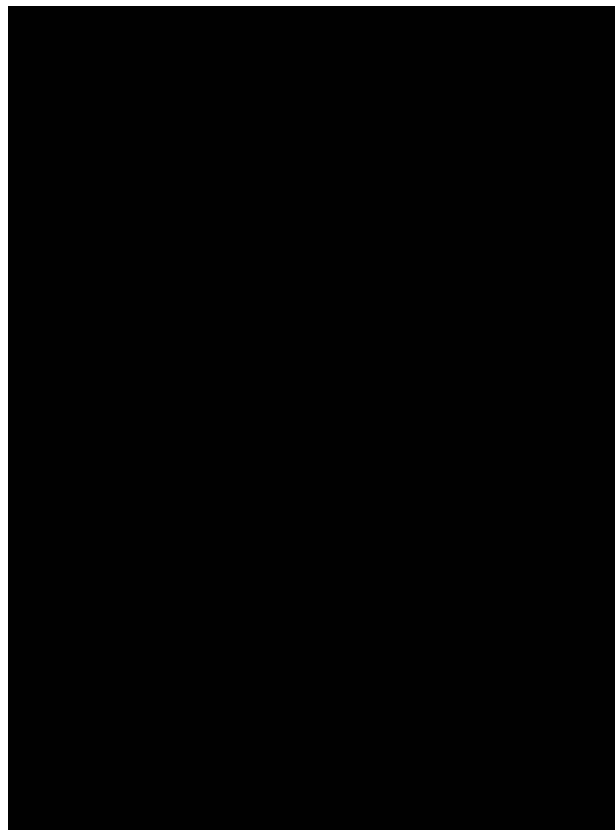


Illustration 4: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Slave Market (1866).  
Sterling and Francine Clarke Institute, Williamstown (Massachusetts).  
Painting exhibited at the Salon in 1867.



Illustration 5: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Slave Market in Rome* (1884).  
The Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.

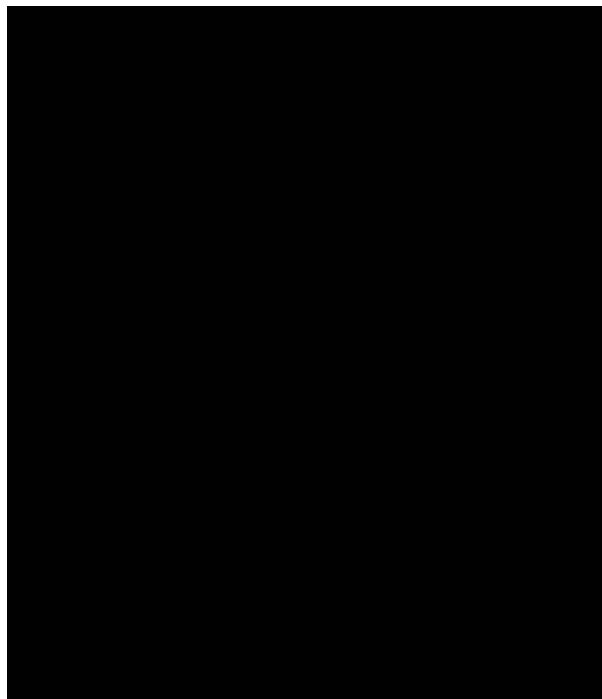


Illustration 6: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Selling Slaves in Rome* (1884).  
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

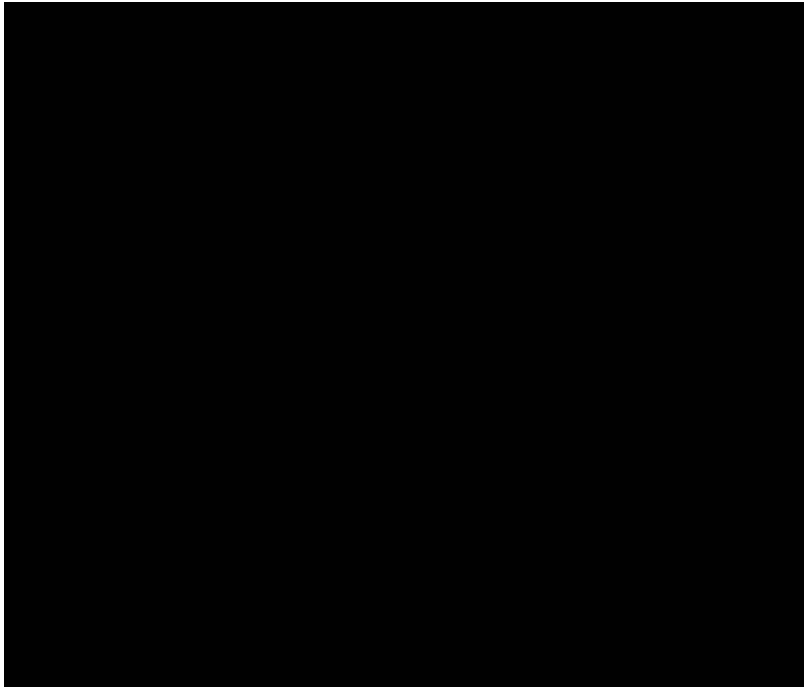


Illustration 7: Gustave Courbet, *The Origin of the World* (1866)  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.