E.ZOLA'S "L'ASSOMOIR": ASPECTS OF THE ANALYSIS

Tatyana Yu. Guryanova¹, Lilia A. Metelkova², Elena L. Zaitseva^{3*}, Olga V. Zarubkina⁴

¹Associate Prof., The Ulianov Chuvash State University, RUSSIA, vgurtat@yandex.ru

²Associate Prof., Moscow State University of Civil Engineering (National Research University),
RUSSIA, lilia.metelkova@gmail.com

³Associate Prof., The Ulianov Chuvash State University, RUSSIA, 917elena@mail.ru

⁴Associate Prof., Saint Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design,
SPbSUID, RUSSIA, vgurtat@yandex.ru

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The article is the author's take on E. Zola's novel "L'Assomoir", which is the so-called "roman ouvrier" (a novel about worker's life). The central character of the novel is Gervaise on her way of becoming a victim of the environment and bad heredity, her programmed tragic fate in conditions of drunkenness and poverty, her moral decay. The authors aim at making the outline of Zola's novel from such key points as human body, alcoholism, the city of Paris, celebrations, and to highlight a feature in the style of the novel, i.e. the use of comparisons and metaphors based on images of animals. The main aspects of the analysis are the system of oppositions (man-animal, the Gougets – the Lorilleux, capital – province, abundant feasts-poverty), which is transmitted through the author's use of argo and familiar vocabulary, very sharp depiction of family violence, degeneracy and beastliness. Oppositions in the novel are based on using the metaphors: the trap / assomoir is both the name of the tavern, and alcohol, but also the consequences of alcohol, and the difficulties of life, and life itself; a cubbyhole is both a calm little world, the embodiment of happiness for Gervaise, and a small room - a kennel-like hole in which she dies, and the embodiment of Gervaise's fall from her happy little world into a dark emptiness. The fall of Gervaise is described through a gradual narrowing of space. Gervaise's death is inevitable but a good lesson and warning for every reader, the novel itself not losing its acuteness.

Keywords: opposition, Zola, argot, novel about workers, roman ouvrier, analysis, denouement

1. INTRODUCTION

E. Zola's novel «L'assomoir» begins in 1850 in Paris, where Gervaise Macquart and Auguste Lantier with their two children moved from Provence (10). Lantier leaves the family for the other woman, Adèle, taking his belongings and Gervaise's last money. Out of grief, Gervaise got into a fight with Adèle's sister Virginie in the laundry, this first fight being a kind of initiation of Gervaise into the brutal Parisian life. In a hostile city, abandoned by her husband and the father of her children, Gervaise must cope and survive. The whole novel is built on oppositions: flesh – spirit, carnal-spiritual, machine-man, Gouget-Lorilleux, human-bestial. Throughout the novel, the reader sees Gervaise as the central character, E. Zola having made a woman the

main character of his novel about the working environment (roman ouvrier) (5). According to the author, «the novel was supposed to show how the common people really live, to explain through the living conditions the mores of the people, how drunkenness, the degradation of the family, scuffle, getting used to any shame and any poverty originates in the difficult working conditions, from the very environment of the existence of workers, promiscuity and indifference...in a word, a very precise picture of people life with its obscenities, negligence, rude language» (11). In the magazine «La Tribune» (1868), E. Zola writes that «the workers are suffocating in the narrow dirty quarters in which they are forced to crowd...the city is being gentrified, but not for them: every new boulevard throws them into old houses of the outskirts. Sunday comes, and they do not have the opportunity to go somewhere to breathe some air and sit in pubs...When there is not enough money, and there are no prospects, they enjoy what is within easy reach».

2. DISCUSSION

«L'Assomoir» has 13 chapters, of which chapter 7 is like a division point for «before» and «after»: the first six chapters show Gervaise's advancement, chapter 7 is both the very rise in Gervaise's life and the beginning of her fall, chapters 8-13 describe in detail Gervaise's personal degradation. Gervaise is a representative of the working class, but she was kneaded in the rural environment: she left her native village and tried to gain a foothold in the growing industrial zone of Paris (2). There are two types of workers in the novel: some, like Gouget, sober, work 300 days a year with no debts; others (Coupeau at the end of his life) work 170 days and are constantly drunk (1, 4, 6, 8). The people in the novel «L'Assomoir» are shown living only to satisfy their carnal needs, as well as participating in the spread of rumors: people sleeping together as beasts in piles, fathers, mothers, children / *les gens couchés comme des bêtes en tas, pères, mères, enfants* (11). The people are not yet a political force, the word «people» / «peuple» is used without any political connotations; not yet meaning «core of the nation, all persons subject to the same laws, subject of political rights» (13), and capitalism, whose victim is the people, if present in the «L'Assomoir», then invisibly (unlike the novel «Germinal»).

In the second chapter, Gervaise manages to drown out her bad mood working endlessly, she explains to Coupeau her vision of an ideal life: It would be ideal for me to work quietly, enough bread, a clean room / *Mon idéal ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre*. (12). These are the desires of an ordinary worker, who does not need any shocks or revolutions, who will be content with little. Chapter 3 is devoted to the wedding of Gervaise and Coupeau. Their wedding voyage is a wandering around Paris: first the city hall, then the wedding in the church, waiting for a festive dinner, it was decided to brighten up with a walk around Paris and a trip to the Louvre. In the description of the civil ceremony at the city hall and especially in the visit to the museum, the author shows how far apart the two classes – bourgeoisie and workers are: Passers-by stopped to see a gentleman dragging a fat mother Coupeau with her green shawl and black cap / *les passants s'arrêtaient pour voir ce monsieur promenant la grosse mère Coupeau en châle vert, en bonnet noir* and the bourgeoisie: brides in white, girls with pink belts, endless processions of gentlemen and ladies of *comme il faut* / *des mariées en blanc, demoiselles à ceintures roses, des cortèges interminables de messieurs et de dames l'air très comme il faut* (12). Paris mocks the procession: The procession splashed through the mud... two street tramps accompanied them with carnival shouts...shopkeepers, having fun, leaned out from behind their windows...the festive outfits of these shackled people were like funny carnival costumes ...dresses of all kinds, like at the luxury exhibition of these poor people/ *le défilé s'espaçait dans la crotte... deux voyous crièrent à la chienlit...des boutiquiers, l'air amusé, se haussèrent derrière leurs vitrines...une raideur de gens endimanchés donnait des drôleries de carnaval...mêlaient les modes, traînaient à la file les décrochez-moi-ça du luxe* (12). A visit to the museum shows a complete lack of understanding by the people of the culture and art to which the working class has no access: All these gods, colossi...No, my word, today they process the stone much better / *les colosses, les dieux...Ils trouvaient tout ça vilain. On travaillait joliment mieux la pierre au jour d'aujourd'hui* (12), and with this description, the author of the novel points to the segregation of society. In the titles of the paintings, the reader can again see an omen: "The Raft of Medusa" is the collapse of all Gervaise's dreams, "Kermessa" is the feast that is coming in chapter 7. The vagaries of the weather (the sunny day changes into the rain) serve as a bad omen for Gervaise and Coupeau. At the festive table, when everything portends happiness, Gervaise talks with the gravedigger - father Bazouzh, in the image of which the imminent death is represented. It is as if Gervaise is not destined to be happy.

Chapter 7 is the highest point of Gervaise's development. Gervaise's laundry becomes a pleasant place, attracting residents of the district with cleanliness, warmth and responsiveness of the hostess. At the same time, there are alarming signs: Coupeau is addicted to alcohol, and Gervaise is becoming more and more immoderate in food, and she desires not simple, but expensive dishes. Gervaise spends an exorbitant amount (without paying off the debt Already) on treats, gathers everyone at the table (from Gouge to

Lorilleux), the celebration turns into a bacchanal. The celebration of her name day marks the victory of intemperance over thrift and labor, and during dessert, Lantier appears, thus the juxtaposition of the bad past (Lantier) and the good present (Gouget) in Gervaise's life is recreated. Lantier is the embodiment of Gervaise's bad heredity; his appearance can be considered as a kind of attack of an evil force. Gouget is a blacksmith, and his forge is a kind of protection for a frightened creature (Gervaise) (9).

The appearance of Lantier further aggravates the estrangement in Gervaise's family: one of her sons, Claude, disappears from the first pages of the novel and is no longer mentioned, the other-Etienne-is sent to Lille after a while. The feast ends, and the gradual but constant moral degeneration of Gervaise begins. Lantier begins to live in the house of Gervaise, his introduction into the life of the family symbolizes the decomposition of family values. Work, which at first was the basis of the well-being and prosperity of the family, gradually degrades and comes to naught: Coupeau starts pub-crawling (E. Zola describes in detail Coupeau's tavern shifting), all values - husband, family, work, well-being had become meaningless for Gervaise. The last element of Gervaise's downfall is her laundry, which no longer belongs to her. Virginie grabs all: both the laundry, which Virginie buys, and Lantier. Gervaise returns from the status of patron to her position of an employee. The reader can only hope that Gervaise's fall will not reach the bottom, but family values disappear with the death of Mother Coupeau. With Lantier's move Gervaise does not object folding ready-to-wash dirty laundry under her marital bed, the linen and the bed symbolizing Gervaise's moral decay. She no longer cares about debts, garbage, and dirt. During the funeral of Mother Coupeau, Gervaise meets the grave-digger Bazouge for the second time (this is the second warning to Gervaise from the side of symbolic evil).

The Coupeau family, having lost all their material values (all the property was sold to junk dealers), begins to lose health and reason: Coupeau ends up in the hospital with delirium tremens seizures, Nana becomes a kept woman, Gervaise goes out to sell herself. Coupeau dies in a hospital, presenting for doctors a curious visual aid on the influence of alcohol on a person.

Hereditary alcoholism is the central line in the cycle " Rougon-Macquart": Gervaise is the daughter of an alcoholic, old Macquart, who did not extinguish his pipe in a drunken stupor and died in such an accidental fire (the novel "Doctor Pascal"); Gervaise and her mother allowed themselves to drink anisette, but one day Gervaise almost died from this and since then she has an aversion to alcohol: / *avec sa mère elle buvait de l'anisette mais elle faillit en mourir un jour* (12) (it is noteworthy that at the beginning of the novel, Gervaise is 22 years old, until the age of 16 she lived with her parents). Coupeau is the son of an alcoholic who died of drunkenness: he had smashed his head...a day of being drunk / *il s'était écrabouillé la tête...un jour de ribote* (12); from drunkenness Gouget's father was already in prison. While writing the novel, E Zola consulted Dr. V. Magnan (V. Magnan De l'alcoolisme, de diverses formes du délire alcoolique et de leur traïture) about the consequences of alcoholism. In " L'Assomoir", Coupeau's slow degradation is described: on the first date with Gervaise, he does not understand how anyone can waste time on drinking at all: *As for eau-de-vie and other beastliness...no need of this/ Quant au vitriol ...et aux autres cochonneries...Il n'en fallait pas* (12), then he finds pleasure and problem-escape in it (Coupeau fell from the roof and can't work), and at the end of his life he completely plunges into alcoholic intoxication, becomes cruel to his daughter and wife and dies in attacks of delirium tremens. The tavern appears already in the first chapter, Gervaise looks through the windows of the tavern and sees workers already drunk on a day off (*déjà gagnés*) and the owners who sell drinks. The author devotes a long concentrated description to the distillation machine (chapter 2): in this description, there is a sense of anxiety and caution, in its description, issuing an underground snore / *ronflement souterrain*, the machine resembles the devil. Coupeau and Gervaise, having barely crossed the threshold of the tavern, are already intrigued and fascinated by how the distiller works, but they feel dislike for the entire atmosphere of the tavern, Gervaise calls drunkenness "an abomination": *Oh ! C'est vilain de boire* (12). Gradually Coupeau and Gervaise get further and further into this kind of trap and in chapter 10 the wreck of Gervaise is shown: she sits at a table with Coupeau and the other workers and submits to the feeling of lightness that alcohol brings: she wanted to inhale the smell, get drunk to a piggy state / *elle aurait voulu renifler l'odeur; goûter à la cochonnerie* (12). Thus, through the description of drunkenness, the author shows class inequality in a shaded form: the excessive consumption of alcohol in the popular environment is described in detail, but the responsibility of the elites for this is not described. E. Zola puts an end to the literary tradition, when, for example, in the works of F. Rabelais and F. Villon's wine was held in high esteem, the drunkard was the hero of fascinating comic plots. In "L'Assomoir", alcohol is no longer a divine gift, it does not enlighten, there is so much alcohol that the author compares it to a river (as well as the ocean): And wine ... flowed like water in the Seine, and immediately disappeared, like a stream disappears in a parched land / *Et le vin . . .ça coulait...comme l'eau coule à la Seine. Un vrai ruisseau, lorsqu'il a plu et que la terre a soif* (12), and alambic – with hell / *cuisine d'enfer* (12) with all its horrors: the devil's swill /source de

poison, the shadow of the car drew abominations on the wall, tailed figures and monsters opening their mouths to devour visitors / l'ombre d'un appareil dessinait des abominations, des figures avec des queues, des monstres ouvrant leurs mâchoires comme pour avaler le monde (12). This is evil and the cause of moral decay.

When creating a novel, E. Zola works with the dictionary "Dictionnaire de la langue verte: argot parisien comparé" by A. Delvaux (1886), as a rule, editions of the novel in French have page-by-page explanations for argot and familiar vocabulary. The use of argot, on the one hand, contributes to the creation of the image of the working class as illiterate and uneducated, on the other hand, it is a tribute, an honor to the self-taught people who created their own language in the conditions of the decomposition of morals and the erasure of all decency. A lot of argotisms are devoted to the alcohol, for example, the words schnick, riquiqui, brlolt, fil-en-quatre, rogomme, vitriol, chien are given to describe vodka. The more Gervaise degrades, the more colloquialisms and argots with the meaning of hopelessness appear in the novel:

Table: Argot in the novel

Original in the novel - argot	Translation word-to word of the original	Neutral synonym to the original argot	Translation of neutral synonym
<i>Lalie...faisait sonner le sapin</i>	Lali is breathing out last	n'avait plus longtemps à vivre	had no longer to live
<i>béquiller</i>	To gorge	manger	To eat
<i>braise</i>	hot coals	monnaie	money
<i>gnognote</i>	trash	chose sans valeur	a worthless thing
<i>claquer</i>	To gnash someone's teeth	manger	To eat
<i>riva son cou</i>	Shut her up	fit taire	silenced her
<i>sans-touche</i>	Never touch	jour de paie	payday

A special place in the novel is given to Paris: the borders of the city are an abattoir on the one hand and a hospital on the other, so this city brings death from everywhere: even in the hospital, where Coupeau ends up at the end of his life, they are powerless to help him, he dies. Paris as a city of death is contrasted with the village, the province: when Coupeau, who has already become a drunkard, goes to work in the province, he returns from there, cured, without having drunk once in three months: it is useful for drunkards to leave Paris, where a vodka fog hangs on the streets / ça désaltère les pochards de quitter l'air de Paris où il y a dans les rues une vraie fumée d'eau-de-vie (12). Gervaise does not go beyond the boundaries of her neighborhood, and if her life with Coupeau begins with a visit to the museum, then in the end the horizon is limited for her to Bru's kennel, in which she is found. The improvement of the city, described in the novel through the name of the street Golden Drop / Goutte d'Or and the fall of Gervaise form another contrast in the novel: a new well-maintained city with boulevards and entertainment establishments for every taste does not accept beggars and poverty, there is no place for Gervaise in it: under the ever-increasing luxury of Paris, the squalor of the suburbs died and was like construction dirt on the face of a new city / sous le luxe montant de Paris la misère de faubourg crevait et salissait ce chantier d'une ville nouvelle (12).

The style of the novel is characterized by the use of comparisons and metaphors based on the mention of animals, a kind of bestiary. At the very beginning of the novel, the author metaphorizes the workers going to the factory as the herd / piétinement de troupeau (12), thus conveying the bringing of the working class to a bestial state, its desecration and stupefaction, humility and submission. In the description of the fight between Gervaise and Virginie in the laundry, the author uses comparisons with a monkey / singe, guenon. Nana grows up like a calf at the age of 15 / comme un veau, everyone in the area calls her chicken / la petite poule. Virginie and Lantier are compared with cats / chats, Coupeau-with a monkey / singe, the Lorilleux family with woodlice / cloportes. The decomposition of the characters, their moral decline is shown in the novel as a return to the animal state, as a counter-evolution, from the highest to the lowest: father Bazhar, who killed his daughter Lali, shakes his head like an animal bitten by flies / animal qui a de l'embêtement

(12), Coupeau in fits of drunken fever screams like an animal whose paw was torn off / bête dont ou avait arraché une patte (12), Gervaise returns home from work, as cows return to their stall / de l'air bête des vaches qui rentrent chez elles (12), Gervaise's life ends in a room, similar to a burrow, or a doghouse, a hole / niche (12).

In the climactic chapter 7, the author describes in detail the goose that is served to the table. The goose is a metaphor, behind whose soft white skin / peau blonde (12) Gervaise is hiding: just as a goose that is served on a platter and eaten (there are bones that are gnawed by a cat that has made its way through an open window after the feast) cannot come to life and becomes the main "victim" of the feast, so Gervaise, the main victim in the novel, could not stop her fall. Such an animalistic description, when people are equated with animals, contributes to the reader's perception of this undisguised sad situation, the environment in which the people live.

Another point in the novel is the description of the human body and carnal desires, also built on oppositions: this is an appetite for carnal food, not spiritual, gluttony on the verge of gluttony in the description of Gervaise's name day – and snapping her teeth from hunger / dances devant un buffet vide (12) - at the end of her life; satisfying Gervaise's lust in chapter 7 (I can't, it's his fault....her mother's petticoat disappeared into another man's room / je ne puis pas, c'est sa faute...le jupon de sa mère ett disparu chez l'autre home (12)) and Lali's bodily torments (along the ribs, thin purple zebras descended to the hips, the scars from the whip, not the body, but only bones piercing the skin / sur les côtes de minces zébrures violettes descendaient jusqu'au cuisines, les cinglements du fouet, plus de chaire, les os trouaient la peau (12). The body desires and demands, and Gervaise succumbs to the power of stomach, even when she is platonically in love with Gouget and watches him work in the forge, she thinks that she would eat something delicious (just delicious, not just anything) / elle aurait mangé quelque chose de bien (12).

The human body is presented in the novel as experiencing torment (dying Lali) and able to break free from the oppressive environment (Nana escaping from her parents). The author begins the novel with a restrained description of everything that relates to the body, ending with a violent, detailed and naturalistic description, which symbolizes the inability to tolerate such a life and the possibility of people explosion.

The novel describes the celebrations: first, the wedding of Gervaise and Coupeau, the christening of Nana, the name day of Gervaise, the first communion of Nana. All these celebrations seem to be related to the working and bourgeois environment (such events are celebrated by both ordinary people and the nobility), but in the working environment, meetings are concentrated around the table and food in all their excesses, extremes and immoderation. Name days, christenings, weddings - they all lose their sacred meaning for the sake of the carnal. Describing the feasts, especially on the name day of Gervaise (she gathers guests, while having a considerable debt to Gouget), the author predicts the score in the battle «Gervaise versus degradation»: degradation wins. Thus, the holidays in the novel are not a temporary rearrangement in the life cycle, it is the overthrow of Gervaise and her family: the celebration of Nana's first communion was the last normal day / le dernier beau jour du ménage (12). The celebration of Gervaise's name day serves as a kind of harbinger of disorder (Gervaise invites guests to her workplace (laundry), where by definition disorder is intolerable). Work, family, the measured life of Gervaise before the name day - all this could resume after the feast, but Gervaise chooses her fall, she is satisfied with dirt and lack of money, anything to do nothing, she literally avoids doing something that could stop her decomposition, even dirt was a warm nest for her...she no longer cared about her debts...every 10 steps she owed someone / même la saleté était un nid chaud...ses dettes ne la tourmentaient plus...elle avait des poufs tous les dix pas (12). This is the way E. Zola shows the workers satisfied with their situation and describes the society not bursting out into the revolution.

3. CONCLUSION

Gervaise dies in a hole-like-kennel in which Father Bru had died before her. Gervaise's whole life exists surrounded by three B: Father Bru, the personification of the inevitability of an inglorious existence, who goes out at night to beg, the grave-digger Bazouge, who lives behind a wall from Gervaise and personifies an inglorious death waiting for Gervaise; Father Bijar, the embodiment of the evil brought by alcohol. These characters are not the main actors, no explanation was found for such a coincidence when preparing the article; perhaps the initial letter B is taken by the author from the French words bête (animal), brut (animal, rude), bas (bottom). E. Zola ends his novel with the words of the grave-digger Bazouge, this is a kind of bilan-the result, the result of life, but also a warning for the reader.

The fall of Gervaise is described through a gradual narrowing of space: at the beginning of her life it is a whole street Goutte d'Or, which tightens to a hole at the end of the novel. Metaphors run through the whole

novel: the trap / assomoir is both the name of the tavern, and alcohol, but also the consequences of alcohol, and the difficulties of life, and life itself. A cubbyhole is both a calm little world, the embodiment of happiness for Gervaise, and a kennel-like room - a hole in which she dies, and the embodiment of Gervaise's fall from her happy little world into a dark emptiness.

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