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FEMALE ALLEGORY AS ANTI-NATIONALIST SATIRE IN
L'ATTAQUE DU MOULIN AND BOULE DE SUIF

by

Deborah B. Grimshaw

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

FEMALE ALLEGORY AS ANTI-NATIONALIST SATIRE IN *L'ATTAQUE*

DU MOULIN AND BOULE DE SUIF

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Master of Arts

The year 1880 was rife with nationalist fervor and a general glorification of the French nation through imagery, literature and legislation. However, at this same time, Les Soirées de Médan, a collection of stories concerning the Franco-Prussian war also appear, bringing with them a distinctly anti-nationalist, harsh, and unforgiving view of the war and France's role in it. This thesis will examine personifications of France within L'attaque du Moulin and Boule de suif, the first two texts of Les Soirées de Médan, and their definite lack of the nationalist enthusiasm that characterized the time of their creation. The study of these allegorical representations reveals the place in the mentality of the French people of the concept they represent, a shorthand for a complex and evolving idea. Though others have mapped out the historical appearance and place of representations of France, I will delve into the possible reasons for the necessity of the feminine in this allegorization,

the connotations and conventions that make it an effective tool for fighting nationalist tides for both Zola and Maupassant, and the historical and political context that allow us to trace a general shift in the concept of the nation through these female symbols. Furthermore, given the prevalence of female allegories at the time, and the monopolization of their usage for political purposes, the choice of these authors to employ allegory (a rhetorical mode characterized by its official status with the very regime they are criticizing) takes on further levels of criticism and satire. Exploring the opposition and relationship of these two literary female allegories to contemporary allegorical and visual representations will reveal how they relate to -- and eventually criticize and reject— the prevailing political and nationalist discourse of their day.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1880, it appeared that France had recovered from the blows of the preceding decade. The political, social, and cultural implications of the Prussian invasion, the end of the Empire, the civil war, and the initially shaky establishment of the Third Republic all appeared to have led to the creation of a stronger France with an equally strengthened sense of national pride. This nationalism, elevating France and her political institutions, was present throughout politics, public celebrations, education, and the arts, and often took the form of allegorical female figures. In this same year, however, *Les Soirées de Médan*, a collection of texts dealing with the Franco-Prussian war, was published, differing so wildly from the general atmosphere of artistic and political production that it drew harsh public criticism (Hennique 6). Maupassant, a contributor to the project, pointed out the necessity of breaking from prevailing sentiment when talking about the proposed goal of the project to condemn the pervasive nationalist discourse as both hypocritical and unnecessary. By focusing on the use of female allegory in the first two texts of the collection (written by Zola and Maupassant), it becomes clear that this rhetorical mode constitutes an effective method of condemning the dominant nationalist trend. Their use of allegory actually enables a direct relationship to the conventional and propagandist allegorical portrayal of the nation, placing the narratives in the position to then mock, parody, and satirize the nationalist trends that they see surrounding them, to

peel away the trappings of a false nationalist pride, and reveal the true state of the French nation as these two authors have observed it.

In order to understand the circumstances from which this nationalism sprang, as well as the relevance of using the Franco-Prussian war as a means to ridicule the nationalist tide, I will first sketch the historical context of the conflict during which the stories of *Les Soirées de Médan* take place. Before war was even declared, the French outlook on a prospective conflict with their neighbors and former conquest was one of confidence and nonchalance. David Gates, a French historian as well as former lecturer for the Ministry of Defense of the UK, in his in-depth study of the Franco-Prussian war explains, “the French, who had an atavistic penchant for the offensive, envisaged mounting a thrust towards Berlin much as Napoleon had done in 1806 and confidently expected the same outcome” (159). Napoleonic pride still ran rampant, and as news that France had declared war flooded the Parisian streets on July 19th, 1870, it “was cheered by huge crowds who sang ‘the Marseillaise’ and chanted ‘*Vive la France! A Berlin!*’” (Gates 157). This naïve and short-lived exuberance was a dramatic transformation from a public that had previously attacked official attempts to strengthen the French military. Public funding had been anything but forthcoming, and this sudden and superficial support was not enough to carry the grossly underprepared troops through the fight ahead. “Republican deputies in particular had an implacable dislike for standing armies of any description, rejected ‘offensive’ wars and wanted France’s defense to be entrusted to the nation in arms, should she be attacked” (156). This romantic and idealized projection of actual conflict, where the citizens rise up in the defense of their beloved *Patrie*, led not only to dwindling of the troops maintained by the French government, but

the deterioration of the personal responsibility assumed by each citizen as well. “The nation in arms” is a sufficiently vague phrase to allow those charged with protecting the nation to diffuse this responsibility, always towards this abstraction of *le peuple* that failed to materialize.

The reliance on abstract and immeasurable qualities rather than concrete numbers and statistics manifests itself in the prized place of courage, luck, and national superiority in the French military mentality. “French generals believed that *l’esprit militaire* with which their soldiers were imbued was the finest in Europe. [...] Although the French generals were quite right in identifying morale as the single most important influence on warfare, in doing so they overlooked the significance of too many other factors, many of which, ironically, affect people’s willingness to go on fighting” (Gates 155). This reliance on unquantifiable values, coupled with an elitist distrust in maintaining small, regional militia to be called on in times of war (a concept that Prussia had adopted and enforced whole-heartedly) led to frightening statistics: France maintained 288000 troops (including those abroad), whereas Prussian forces numbered 938000 (Gates 153), a ratio which should have made any possible conflict appear formidable and serious. The French high command and military educators’ response? Scorn. “It is a magnificent organization on paper; but a doubtful instrument for defense and would be very imperfect during the first period of an offensive war” (qtd. in Gates 153).

However, their reliance on “*Système D*’, namely *débrouillage* – the tradition of muddling through” (Gates 154) proved completely ineffectual against the Prussian campaign, which focused on speed, efficiency and an openness to modern tactics. As Wawro states, “planning and organization were other Prussian strengths not conspicuous

in the French army” (47). The results were immediate, and any hope of international allies was abandoned (Gates 160). France was ostracized and isolated, a sentiment that did little to aid the morale of troops and indubitably contributed to the feeling of hopelessness and the justification of abandonment that many experienced throughout the hostilities. This sense of isolation could only become more acute as the fledgling Third Republic struggled to remain afloat as the surrounding monarchies looked on. In addition, the humiliation of civil conflict and the horror of the Commune¹ presented yet another weakness in the face of total national defeat: they failed first to stand against the enemy, then to stand together at all.

The repression of the Commune was swift and terrible, yet despite the bloody dawn of this régime, “the Third Republic was to last until 1940, making it the most enduring regime in modern French history. And indeed, although its history between the two world wars was to be troubled, the regime’s prestige up to the peace treaties at the end of the World War I was extremely high” (Jones 217). A possible explanation for the strength of this régime could be found precisely in the vicious nature of the Commune repression: the war had clearly awakened something within the French people. Robert Tombs, a nineteenth century French political historian, states that “the defeat of 1870 and

¹ After the signing of the humiliating treaty of Frankfurt, “Paris smarted under the blow, and elected a municipal government, which, in the spirit of national defense of 1792, took on the title of “the Commune.” (Jones 217). The Commune felt betrayed by the capitulatory government, and France felt betrayed by the Commune, a blow which smarted so heavily that it provoked unheard of reprisals, overshadowing not only the damages of the war, but also the so-called “Terreur” which had irrevocably stained the birth of the French Republic for foreign onlookers. As Jones explains, “The Revolutionary Tribunal between 1792 and 1794 had accounted for fewer than 3000 deaths; in a single week anti-Commune justice meted out on the streets of Paris accounted for between 25,000 and 30,000 deaths by summary execution, with over 40,000 Parisians taken prisoner. Hostages taken by the Commune, including the archbishop of Paris, were shot” (218). Paris was “kept under siege conditions” until 1876 (Jones 218).

the fall of the empire awakened national fervor, but also inflamed old divisions.[...] The civil war of 1871 was the most violent expression of this division. It still colored the struggle between royalism and republicanism during the 1870s” (xii). This national fervor initially manifested itself in the violent destruction of the Commune, as unity was necessary in order to create a national identity, one that could not be found without Paris.

However, a more obvious brand of national fervor was present in the advent of the nationalist rhetoric that teemed through public discourse. As Tombs explains,

After 1870, the country was bombarded as never before with patriotic exhortation, in part in reaction to defeat, in part in an attempt by the new republic to create a legitimating secular ideology, in part as a means for the enemies of the republic to modernize and widen their own political appeal as traditional loyalties waned. The effectiveness of this barrage—in so far as it was effective—was made possible by the process of social and cultural integration which, in Eugene Weber’s phrase, was making peasants into Frenchmen. (xii)

Patriotic sentiment and intense nationalism were therefore a natural backlash of the humiliation and the loss of liberty experienced both through the Commune and the Prussian victory and occupation. One of the immediate outlets for such patriotic exhortation was the loss of Alsace-Lorraine: not only had French national unity been severely disrupted by the Commune, but the loss of Alsace-Lorraine as part of the treaty caused serious turmoil and continued to serve as one of the main elements of *revanche* discourse. Maurice Barrès, one of the main supporters of extreme nationalism, along with

other writers of the day “stressed themes of uprootedness and the need to recapture the lost provinces in order to retap the sources of national energy” (Tombs 50). The importance of the national identity and the national consciousness emerges from the conflict.

Though these sources do not consistently differentiate between the terms “patriotism” and “nationalism,” I feel that such a distinction will clarify my eventual analyses of the works and representations of the French “nation” and “patrie.” In the definition of Robert Tombs, “[nationalism] promoted the values and interests of the nation to a position of primacy, subordinating or even excluding from consideration other loyalties or beliefs” (3). I will thus use the term nationalism to refer to the cult of the nation, especially the outward expressions of devotion to this “secular ideology,” and generally bearing a direct relationship to the political arena, or, in other words, being rooted in some type of political agenda. Patriotism, on the other hand, I will treat as referring to a connection to the land itself, the spirit of the territory rather than a political or Parisian phenomenon. After the stunning event of 1871, it is impossible to deny that both aspects of this sentiment erupted in a veritable frenzy in the 1870s, culminating at the time the *Soirées de Médan* were published.

The nationalist fever is clear in the legislation passed in the year 1880. This year marked a climax in a nationalist fervor, in idealized and glorified history, which Maurice Agulhon refers to as the birth of “triumphalisme” (*Marianne au combat* 12). “La Marseillaise” became the national anthem, the 14th of July was declared a national holiday, the Parliament returned to Paris in a symbolic gesture, and “dans le domaine de l’art, c’est précisément le 24 février 1880 qu’est érigée à Paris, devant l’Institut, la

première statue monumentale durable de la République française, œuvre de Soitoux, qui attendait son heure depuis 1849” (12). Other fundamental decisions include a law in 1880 dictating that all public buildings must be inscribed with the motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” (Nord 190). Essentially, the excitement of this period spawned many of the iconic elements that constitute the identity of the French nation, especially from an international perspective.

By no means was this nationalism a new or unheard-of concept; this was merely a time when the outward signs were extremely encouraged and consequently prevalent. Jules Michelet had written long before in 1847 in his preface to Histoire de la Révolution française, complaining that there was a severe lack of outward manifestation in appreciating all that the French nation had accomplished since 1789:

La Révolution est en nous, dans nos âmes ; au dehors, elle n’a point de monument. [...] Le Champ de Mars, voilà le seul monument qu’a laissé la Révolution...L’empire a sa colonne, et il a pris encore presque à lui seul l’Arc de Triomphe ; la royauté a son Louvre, ses Invalides ; la féodale église de 1200 trône encore à Notre-Dame ; il n’est pas jusqu’aux Romains, qui n’aient les Thermes de César. Et la Révolution a pour monument...le vide... (2)

Though it took several years to come to fruition, finally in 1883, in the Place de la République, a monument to the glories of the Revolution was unveiled. “The councilors also decided that the monument should feature an allegorical statue of the republic, to them the most important phase and legacy of the Revolution” (Nelms 71). This rather

sudden onslaught of public enthusiasm for commemorating French victories and French identity goes hand in hand with the sudden popularity of Marianne as well.

The imagery of Marianne, which, in addition to representing the French republic, represents the spirit of French liberty as well, reached its widest dissemination at this time. Busts of Marianne were busily placed all over France from the 1870s until 1940 (Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 12), ending precisely with the Third Republic. This preoccupation with imagery and symbolism can be explained by “the desire to justify and legitimize republicanism and the Third Republic [which] would be a motivating factor in most of the proposals for monuments in the 1880’s” (Nelms 69). In a similar vein, the image of Joan of Arc also enjoyed a revival of political popularity, bringing with her a sense of divine authority and nationalist pride. Thus, this phenomenon of “triumphalisme” can be aligned with a political strategy on the part of the fledgling government to borrow authority from past régimes and create images and standards around which everyone could rally.

The reliance upon imagery and personification from the period of the Revolution was only logical for the republicans:

[They] invited the nation to participate in a range of activities that encouraged beliefs and habits supportive of a democratic public life. The idea was to shape a particular kind of citizen: a conscientious human being who revered the *philosophes* and the revolutionaries of 1789, who valued liberty, laicity, and the riches afforded by literacy and a vital associational life. (Nord 191)

By choosing to elevate representations of the nation, politicians were in effect instructing the citizens how to think about and how to perceive their nation. "Once in power, republicans deployed state authority to make that culture official" (192). During the decade preceding the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Revolution, "communal and departmental councils throughout France planned local centennial ceremonies, sponsored publications, commissioned monuments. These activities were encouraged by the special educational and propaganda programs conducted by prominent republican organizations" (Nelms 125). These organizations were meant to teach "a new understanding of and devotion to the history and principles of the Revolution" (125). The word devotion indicates a religious aura surrounding this nationalist discourse, the worship of the nation replacing organized religion as the source of inspiration and truth.

Manifestations of this national obsession with glorification and imagery extended beyond the obviously politically driven sphere, widely affecting general artistic production throughout France. Reschef explains the characteristics of the literature produced at this time period about the Franco-Prussian war:

De nombreux auteurs ont souligné que, battus dans les batailles rangées, les Français en sont venus à exalter la lutte "partisane" de "guérilla" des gardes mobiles, et l'héroïsme individuel face à la "machine de guerre" prussienne. Ce fut un véritable foisonnement d'histoires soi-disant authentiques, où la débrouillardise et le courage faisaient victorieusement face dans des escarmouches sans importance, si ce n'est pour donner aux Français une satisfaction d'amour-propre: refus de regarder la réalité en face, inclination à se réfugier dans un monde de rêve où l'on pourrait

redistribuer les cartes, où individualisme et valeur personnelle rétabliraient l'équilibre en faveur de la France. (59)

Not only was this escapist tendency apparent in literature, it played a role in the public media as well: "La production caricaturale de la guerre franco-prussienne exprime avec acuité—avec pathétique—un intense besoin d'évasion" (87). These heroic tales, by elevating nationalist sentiment in an unrealistic manner, were therefore encouraging a mentality removed from fact and achievement and depending more on a sense of moral superiority and idealized nostalgic representations.

It is precisely this over-reaching element of nationalism, the tendency to shy away from fact and emphasize national devotion, to which Maupassant, and the other contributors of the *Soirées de Médan*, objected. In summarizing the theory of this collection from the beginning, Maupassant echoes Reschef closely in his criticism of contemporary publications, as he states in a letter to his friend and mentor, Gustave Flaubert on January 5th, 1880:

Nous n'avons eu, en faisant ce livre, aucune intention antipatriotique, ni aucune intention quelconque ; nous avons voulu seulement tâcher de donner à nos récits une note juste sur la guerre, de les dépouiller du chauvinisme à la Déroulède, de l'enthousiasme faux jugé jusqu'ici nécessaire dans toute narration où se trouvent une culotte rouge et un fusil. Les généraux, au lieu d'être tous des puits de mathématiques où bouillonnent les plus nobles sentiments, les grands élans généreux, sont simplement des êtres médiocres comme les autres, mais portant en plus

des képis galonnés et faisant tuer des hommes sans aucune mauvaise intention, par simple stupidité. Cette *bonne foi* de notre part dans l'appréciation des faits militaires donne au volume entier une drôle de gueule, et notre désintéressement voulu dans ces questions où chacun apporte inconsciemment de la passion exaspérera mille fois plus les bourgeois que des attaques à fond de train. Ce ne sera pas antipatriotique, mais simplement vrai. (Maupassant)

First, he asserts that they had no antipatriotic intentions, but instead a desire to represent some truth which is currently masked by superfluous nationalist convention for any narrative involving war, and, more specifically, French soldiers in war. The critical reference to “une culotte rouge,” a definitive emblem of the 1789 Revolution clues us in to Maupassant’s distaste for the glorification and smoothing over of both French victories *and* defeats. The Revolution is not exempt from the need to portray events with a critical and precise eye. Furthermore, the derogatory mention of Déroulède, an excessively patriotic writer who turned to preaching for the “revanche,” and the return of Alsace-Lorraine, is placed in stark contrast with these authors’ supposed *bonne foi* which promises to show human mediocrity in all its realistic awkwardness, rather than ideals. Rather than being caught up in the general (and popular) practice of hyping up French rights and Prussian wrongs, the promise to remain detached from the scenes depicted in the stories of this collection is clearly delivered, as we will see in the succeeding chapters.

The major upheavals, social crises and subsequent restructuring that took place in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war and the commune throughout the 1870s resulted in a

general identity crisis for the French nation. In the face of such obvious and humiliating defeats, there was a need for strength, or at least the memory of strength as a nation, expressed in the general trend towards over-exaggerated nationalism, especially hearkening back to the glory days of 1789 as well as the people's revolutions of the 1800s. This phenomenon can be traced through legislation and widespread official support of the idealized representations and celebrations of the French nation, leading to the image of a semi-deified state, with the French as her loyal worshipers. The need to reveal the hypocrisy, to peel away the false trappings of pseudo-nationalist loyalty that seemed (to some) an unfit remedy for the woes of the country, is the agenda and motivation of the *Soirées de Médan* authors.

The method of fulfilling this objective is accomplished by all of the authors, according to one critic, through ironic twists and reversals.

The use of irony in the direction of satire in naturalist literature can be demonstrated in its diversity and at its best in a collection of short stories [*Les Soirées de Médan*], in fact in the work which is supposed to have typified the French movement. [...] For the young naturalists, the surest way to dispel such illusions was to demystify war and to present the public with an opposite diet to the jingoistic anecdotes with which it was being fed and in which it so delighted. (Baguley 146)

Baguley goes on to examine the use of satire within each of the segments of *Les Soirées de Médan*, but his analysis of the first two stories focus on the final scenes of each narrative: the French officer shouting "Victoire!" after destroying the town in *L'attaque*

du Moulin, and Cornudet whistling *La Marseillaise* while the passengers of the stage coach ostracize Boule de suif, their savior. The presence of irony and satire within *Boule de suif* is not a novel ideal, as Farnlöf states : “Parmi les écrivains naturalistes, Maupassant est sans doute l’auteur le plus souvent associé à la notion d’ironie” (169). However, through the lens of female allegory, the depth of satire and criticism running through both of these short stories becomes apparent, expanding on Baguley’s and others’ study of ironic reversals. Though all of the authors of *Les Soirées de Médan* contributed to this unified project, the compelling and overlooked phenomenon is the use of allegory in two supposedly realist texts, *L’attaque du Moulin* and *Boule de suif*. I propose that a close reading of the female protagonists as allegorical representations of the nation will reveal the very manner through which these stories become cohesive satirical narratives, internally and in relation to each other.

A close analysis of this use of allegory within the first two texts of *Les Soirées de Médan* will be the focus of the first chapter. While Rabosseau states that, for the works of both Zola and Maupassant, “La femme est au centre de l’œuvre” (141), she neglects any metaphorical or allegorical implications of this central role. An allegorical reading of *L’attaque du Moulin* has not been generally publicized, though allegory itself has been the focus of several studies of Maupassant, and *Boule de suif* in particular. Joly explores the role of allegory within the writings of Maupassant, but only within the context of sexual appetite, analyzing the metaphor of the “assimilation entre faim de l’estomac et appétit sexuel” (155), imagery which is definitely present in *Boule de suif*, though this work goes unmentioned in Joly’s analysis. As a testament to the strength of the allegorical imagery within the narrative, viewing the eponymous heroine of *Boule de suif*

as the French nation is a widely accepted reading, as in Chaplin's study. However, a detailed allegorical reading, as well as the implications of the presence of allegory in a realist narrative, have not been addressed. Zola and Maupassant both use a female allegorical representation of France to communicate their anti-nationalist message, a puzzling choice, especially given Zola's publicized perspective on the role of literature: "Naturalism is for him a movement of reaction against Romanticism, the conventional, the grandiloquent, the cult of form, in the name of 'simple reality'. It is 'an eternal need of man', expressing his sense of reality and of present circumstance" (Baguley 14). The fact that *realist* authors, with a proposed project of *realism* would choose to adopt a rhetorical mode so steeped in romantic and clerical convention begs the question: is this congruent with the anti-nationalist project Maupassant described? And if so, how does it aid in the fulfillment of this project? If Maupassant did indeed have "the intention of attacking conventional attitudes" (Chaplin 18), why would he build his narrative around allegory, a tool firmly embedded in convention? And why would Zola, a self-proclaimed realist, follow suit?

The historical, political and literary ramifications of employing female allegory, as well as representing the Nation as a female, will thus be the focus of the second chapter. The thesis will therefore be organized in a progressively expanding way, beginning with the firm establishment of the allegorical reading of *L'attaque du Moulin* and *Boule de suif*, and then progressing through a historically contextualized study of the ramifications of this rhetorical mode. Through a detailed analysis of certain allegorical traits, we will then explore the relationship of these literary allegories to contemporary allegorical females. Through this approach, I will show how the connotations and

associations with allegorical female figures assist the project of realism through parody and satire, creating powerful criticism and dramatic juxtapositions of traditional representations of France and what she has become in these two tales. The third chapter will then focus on the relationship between these female protagonists of the *Les Soirées de Médan* and two female allegorical figures who enjoyed contemporaneous popularity: Marianne and Joan of Arc. The importance of their political role, as well as the striking parallels that can be drawn between these figures and the literary allegorical characters of Maupassant and Zola that appeared in 1880, show an awareness of not only the literary trends which this group refused to follow, but also the contemporary political atmosphere.

Neglecting the study of allegory as a cohesive element of the antinationalist *Médan* project has led to a gross oversight in the academic appreciation of these texts, disregarding their relevance to the intellectual and literary climate into which they were introduced by their authors. The collection was originally published in 1880, with new editions that appeared in both 1930 and 1955, all three editions appearing essentially ten years after a major war, from which we can infer that these stories hold a retrospective quality that has remained renewable through generations, a relevance that has remained largely unexplored. Not meant to be merely a criticism of the Franco-Prussian War and its portrayal, these stories represent a general criticism of the portrayal of war and the Nation, remaining meaningful and provocative to any readership in danger of being swallowed by propaganda and nationalist rhetoric and in search of national identity. In this thesis, I will explore how allegory is what initially gave these stories their effectiveness, and how reexamining the context of such allegory makes these texts a

relevant commentary not only on war, but the bigger question of the place and representation of the French *Patrie*.

Female Allegory within *Les Soirées de Médan*

In *Les Soirées de Médan*, the first two stories in the collection, *L'attaque du moulin* by Emile Zola, and *Boule de Suif* of Guy de Maupassant, present a certain number of parallelisms that go beyond the unified project as described by Maupassant. Both stories attempt to present war, and violence in general, without the glory normally connected with such narratives. Despite the fact that this war was to be the most well-documented conflict in French history to that point, with journalistic and photographic coverage (Chaplin 6), there was a pervasive tendency to escape the reality of these sources in favor of idealized portrayals (Reschef 59). As Catherine Brosman states, “The aim was generally to attack and undermine conventional, that is, idealized, attitudes toward the conflict” (115). However, not only were both authors striving to adopt a more unbiased and detached style of describing the conflict than the prevalent nationalist forces prescribed, they both chose a similar convention as their tool: female allegory.

When Zola approached Maupassant and the four other contributors to *Les Soirées de Médan* about creating “un curieux volume, peu chauvin, et d'une note particulière” (Maupassant), he was already well-established in both the publishing and artistic community, while his five protégés who met regularly as the Médan group were still glad of the extra revenue that another publication would bring (Baguley 23). The propitious nature of such a project was assured by the nationalist turn that both the political and artistic world had adopted. “There was an unusually acute—though ironically very

longstanding – sensitivity to symptoms of decadence, materialism and demoralization, and an equally longstanding and familiar nationalist rhetoric with which to denounce political and social inadequacies” (Tombs xiii). Though all of the stories within this collection address these same inadequacies, they do so without enlisting the aid of nationalist and euphemistic rhetoric in an effort to avoid the tools of propaganda they saw dominating the discourse of war, the use of allegory being among the propagandists’ arsenal. Because of the timing and the objective of this collection, “it is not unusual for the publication of *Les Soirées de Médan* to be heralded as naturalism’s founding event” (Baguley 16), reiterating the distinct nature of such a project from its contemporaries.

In the first short story, we encounter Françoise, a young woman who can be seen as France personified, the ultimate victim of the conflict she witnesses unfolding. *Boule de suif* (or Elisabeth Rousset), the eponymous character of Maupassant’s tale, can also be considered a personification of the *Patrie*, but in this case voluntarily abused and abandoned during the war and ensuing occupation. Considering these two allegorical representations of France, particularly taking into account the order in which they appear in this collection, one discovers an elementary transition in the manner in which these two women, and the country they represent, are treated within the texts. France before the war is shown to be an entity full of innocence and hope, but, in the end, suffers violence at the hands of her enemies and becomes a lonely victim of the conflict. The France of *Boule de Suif* becomes a France without virtue during the Prussian occupation, scorned by those surrounding her, and unsurprisingly, willingly abandoned by her companions after her usefulness is fulfilled. The progression between these two images creates a seamless transition from nostalgic idealization to harsh realities, from naiveté to sin, from

honor to income. In order to understand the effectiveness of the use of female allegory for the writers' socio-political goals, we will first observe how the representation of the country within the texts, the female protagonist, and the representation of the enemy combine to form powerful and often critical imagery of the changing mentality of French citizens vis-à-vis their nation.

The Landscape in Relation to the Female Protagonist

Zola sets his tale in an idealized land, accompanied by a young woman who fits this perfectly picturesque landscape, a scene imbued with a soft atmosphere more suited to a fairy tale than a war scene. The beginning of the story is consumed by a detailed description of nature. "La plaine s'étend, d'une fertilité merveilleuse, déroulant à l'infini des pièces de terre coupées de haies vives, [...] mais ce qui fait surtout le charme de Rocreuse, c'est la fraîcheur de ce trou de verdure" (14). Such words as "merveilleuse" and images of the infinite reinforce the idea of a place of wonder and untold dimensions, more at home in literary tradition than reality. This idea of the unquantifiable, the innumerability of wealth that is "France" stands in direct opposition to the French army, when it arrives to defend the small town against an imminent Prussian attack. The artificial and ridiculously specific goals and definitions of the French army represent an unfortunate imposition that undermines the very worth of the nation they are attempting to protect.

The setting of the scene itself throughout the first chapter is rife with personification and hyperbole, reinforcing both the beauty and the remoteness of such a place from reality. Zola's description of the forest communicates this perfectly:

La Morelle descend des feuillages sous lesquels elle coule pendant des lieues; elle apporte les bruits murmurants, l'ombre glacée et recueillie des forêts. Et elle n'est point la seule fraîcheur : toutes sortes d'eaux courantes chantent sous les bois ; à chaque pas, des sources jaillissent ; on sent, lorsqu'on suit les étroits sentiers, comme des lacs souterrains qui percent sous la mousse et profitent des moindres fentes, au pied des arbres, entre les roches, pour s'épancher en fontaines cristallines. Les voix chuchotantes de ces ruisseaux s'élèvent si nombreuses et si hautes, qu'elles couvrent le chant des bouvreuils. On se croirait dans quelque parc enchanté, avec des cascades tombant de toutes parts. (14)

The land is literally overflowing with pure and "cristalline" water that seems endowed with living characteristics. It sings, murmurs and whispers, as well as actively seeking outlets, as the verb "profiter" indicates. This exaggerated description sets the tone for the entire first chapter, one dedicated to a soft and glowing picture of an idealized France.

Throughout the detailed description, the landscape is continually portrayed as a source of figurative riches, focusing on the river, the source of nourishment for the city it traverses, a city that depends on and profits from its proximity to nature. In this idyllic society, earth and productivity are valued. The father of Françoise is admired by the town for his success, not for his money, and "il travaillait toujours, pour le plaisir" rather than

for monetary or economic compensation (2). The land is the source of his wealth, and the metaphorical language employed to describe the interaction between the mill and the river communicate this prioritization of the land over social institutions: “Lorsque l'eau la battait de son flot d'argent, elle se couvrait de perles, on voyait passer son étrange carcasse sous une parure éclatante de colliers de nacre” (15). This image communicates not only the harmony between human existence and nature, but also the conscience and pride of the French in the wealth of their country before the Prussian invasion. The relationship of the French to their land is presented as a healthy one, of a symbiotic nature, wherein the people work to care for the land, and in return natural resources nourish the people physically as well as providing them with an identity and healthy vitality.

Throughout this chapter, Zola sets up a descriptive style in this short story that at first does not seem to coincide with the stripped-down, anti-propoganda style of the project of the Médanistes. Zola's France is as fertile with promise, youth, vitality, and innocence, essentially, as France before the war. In such sentences as “Dans cette terre continuellement arrosée, les herbes grandissent démesurément” (14), he consistently emphasizes the exaggerated capacities of this land in poetic language, romanticizing the countryside, where “on se croirait dans quelque parc enchanté” (14). Zola takes great pains to personify and enliven the mill, the center of the town's existence, only to say in the following sentence that “les demoiselles qui passaient dessinaient sur leurs albums le moulin du père Merlier” (16), again attributing relic status to this element that by the end of the story only survives in young ladies' amateur drawings. While the culminating event of Zola's first chapter is the perfect engagement of Françoise to Dominique, in the

following chapters, the young fiancé then proceeds to risk his life to protect her from the Prussians only to lose it in front of their firing squad when his honor compels him to face the enemy. Though this descriptive style could be construed as conforming to the nationalist frenzy of the time of its creation, the France as described by Zola in *l'Attaque du Moulin* does not follow the prevalent idea of the legendary and robust nation, and certainly lacks the immediacy of the nationalist writings that had taken over by 1880. Essentially, this France remains separate and unattainable from the nation of 1880: this France of the past is described as though it could never have truly existed, except in the imagination and nostalgia of the people, a comforting fairy tale that must be dispelled with adulthood, a coming of age that is dramatized at the end of the story through Françoise's tragic losses.

Zola continues to elaborate on this ideal image, saying that “jamais une paix si large n'était descendue sur un coin plus heureux de nature ” (23). This descriptive hyperbole sets the stage for the striking contrast of the final scene of the story: a deep fall for a France of impossible ideals during the conflict. This nostalgic vision of a perfect countryside laid to waste by the imposition of war, a human institution, heightens the sense of victimization. As soon as the first conflict breaks out, the reader understands that this war is not governed by sound logic or even good strategy. The commandant of the French soldiers makes a seemingly arbitrary decision to hold the Mill as a strategic stronghold until a certain hour rather than according to the actual outcome of the battle. He operates without considering the needs of the people, focusing instead on the orders of a far-off commander who isn't familiar with the terrain, who is detached and separate from the battle.

The army works against nature rather than with her, and does not work to save the land, but instead to glorify themselves, as we understand during the last scene when it is clear that the region and Françoise have all lost everything, and yet the soldier declares “Victoire” (63) in all seriousness and triumph. The mill, the beating heart of the town that channeled the life source of the river, is irreparable—sounding the death knell of the town, while Françoise has lost both her past and her future in one fell blow. The ironic juxtaposition of the two characters in the final scene brings to light the allegorical reading of France as a lost paradise, where peace reigned without change or challenge until human fallibility and pride are thrown into the mix, at which point innocence is lost, humanity is cast out, and suffering begins to shape reality.

By looking closely at the historical context of the events described in this story, we see inspiration for this allegorical event of tragedy and loss. The humiliation through the ease of the actual invasion and the ineptitude of the engagements was deeply exacerbated by the fact that all of the defeats, and essentially all of the fighting for the Franco-Prussian war, took place on French territory. The immediacy of the physical damage of the struggle enhanced the imagery and sentiment of victimization and exploitation by a stronger, dominant force. Ruins served as continual reminders of defeat, inferiority, and inadequacy. In addition to the psychological effects of such destruction, the physical damages meant economic and commercial loss, making the Treaty of Frankfurt and the payment of war indemnities to Prussia all the more humiliating. The model of Napoleon III, a man who had “shamelessly exploited his famous uncle’s martial reputation” (Gates 162), only to reveal incompetence under pressure, essentially summarizes the whole French situation as war broke over its boundaries.

In fact, according to Brosman, Zola conceived of this war as a sort of “expiation for French decadence in the post-Napoleonic period, especially the Second Empire” (123). For this expiation to be valid, an innocent sacrifice was necessary, and in this story, Françoise is designated as the worthy victim. She was the pride of the town, beautiful and charming. She was fifteen years old, and the author describes her thus: “tout en restant délicate, elle prit une petite figure, la plus jolie du monde. Elle avait des cheveux noirs, des yeux noirs, et elle était toute rose avec ça; une bouche qui riait toujours, des trous dans les joues, un front clair où il y avait comme une couronne de soleil” (18). This description of physical perfection elevates the subject beyond reality. Furthermore, the phrase “couronne de soleil” is a possible reference to Louis XIV and the absolute monarchy of yesteryear, fallen almost precisely 100 years before the publication of this collection and of which the imagery would still be very recognizable by Zola’s readers². Linking Françoise to the old institutions and the old ways of life foreshadows her inability to survive in the modern world, and the impossibility of resurrecting her once she has gone (just as France has painfully rediscovered after attempting to resuscitate both monarchy and empire, only to discover with disappointment that those institutions, once destroyed by revolution, have only returned as pale shadows living on borrowed glory). Françoise in this allegorized role represents a woman who cannot go back to the innocence and promise she once had, if in fact it ever existed at all. The choice of an anticlerical, republican author to associate an allegorical representation of France with a monarchical model of which he did not approve shows a possible criticism of those who remain caught up in nostalgic support of antiquated institutions. If France

² Another possible interpretation of this reference will be discussed in Chapter III, pertaining to popular representations of Marianne around the time of publication of this collection.

remains so tied to regimes that are no longer relevant, she will not survive in the modern world. She may thus represent the France of nostalgia, recreated outside of realistic and current terms.

This description continues, saying that when “elle devenait toute potelée avec l’âge, elle devait finir par être ronde et friande comme une caille” (18). This passage concentrates, just as it did with nature, on not only the state of perfection, but also upon feminine characteristics. The fertility of this young maiden and her ability to produce a new generation and to raise and nurture it closely echo the central role of nature, and the people’s dependence upon it for their sustenance and growth. Her whole being seems to be destined for the matriarchal domain, which is described in terms of the edible. She is meant to provide for those who will eventually consume her, her physical and economic wealth, and yet she knows this destiny and rushes towards marriage in order to fulfill it. She seems ready to make the sacrifice in order to become the fitting and productive member of society that she is destined to be, yet the actual sacrifices she is called upon to make are not the ones she has been carefully prepared for. Rather than being protected, clothed, and admired as part of a society that values her contributions, she is rendered useless (i.e. infertile) in the end by the heart-breaking loss of her fiancé. With her father’s death and the destruction of the mill, the town’s very connection to nature, to the landscape, is severed. Both her place in society and her ability to reproduce are jeopardized and compromised by the Prussian attacks on her small town, increasing the horror of the events of the war.

Through his landscape, Maupassant reveals an entirely different France. Rather than focusing on the combat itself, he chose to concentrate on the personal implications

of the fighting for each stratus of society. As Branson affirms, Maupassant “was less interested in the phenomenon of war, its political or other causes, its history, than in individual behavior during fighting and occupation; yet the implications of war for the understanding of human nature and its relation to the France of his day did not escape him” (16). The author thus focuses on the inner turmoil or lack thereof as he examines them in a frozen countryside. Continuing Zola’s work of dispelling the myth of an idealized, fertile France, the France of Maupassant is perpetually icy, cold, and covered with snow, the antithesis of the idyllic and unattainable Lorraine. Maupassant presents the harsh reality of a France both physically and allegorically frozen, undermining the idealized landscapes and nostalgic images of France that characterize nationalist representation.

We discover in these pages the condition of France under the occupation, a country asleep, dead under a winter of apathy, awaiting some non-descript sign to reemerge. “Depuis quelques temps déjà la gelée avait durci la terre [...] de gros nuages noirs venant du nord apportèrent la neige qui tomba sans interruption pendant toute la soirée et toute la nuit” (73). France is frozen underneath a blanket of snow, having been buried methodically in order to reap personal benefits. The atmosphere of waiting characterizes *Boule de Suif*, but all hope that spring will come, that the nation will somehow awaken, is completely crushed as the story progresses, with the abandonment and ill treatment of Elisabeth Rousset, the protagonist. Furthermore, the landscape is completely indistinct, nothing to be talked about or remarkable, just vast, empty plains of white and untouched snow that the passengers seem unaware of, except when frustrated that it is still in sight. France has become something shameful—to be escaped if possible,

or at least ignored. This is precisely how the characters in the story choose to react to Boule de suif, despite their personal role in her shame. While waylaid by a Prussian officer in the small town of Tôtes on their way to the coast, it becomes clear that he does not intend to allow their departure until Mlle Rousset consents to sleep with him. Initially encouraging of her refusal to do so, all of her traveling companions eventually use every manner possible to persuade her to concede so that they may continue their escape. The link between the protagonist, the physical countryside, and the ideological nation becomes progressively clearer throughout the tale.

In undertaking this project, the authors of the *Soirées de Médan* denied any sort of antipatriotic intentions, but it becomes clear that the character that can most easily be read as an allegory of the current state of France is none other than Elisabeth, the prostitute, an offensive metaphor for the traditionally-minded. A woman who sells herself as a career plays the principal role, and her courage, spirit and generosity are to be admired, despite her lack of conventional morality which the text forces us to acknowledge. The narrator describes her as follows:

Petite, ronde de partout, grasse à lard, avec des doigts bouffis, étranglés aux phalanges, pareils à des chapelets de courtes saucisses; avec une peau luisante et tendue, une gorge énorme qui saillait sous sa robe, elle restait cependant appétissante et courue, tant sa fraîcheur faisait plaisir à voir. Sa figure était une pomme rouge, un bouton de pivoine prêt à fleurir; et là dedans s'ouvraient, en haut, deux yeux noirs magnifiques, ombragés de grands cils épais qui mettaient une ombre dedans; en bas, une bouche

charmante, étroite, humide pour le baiser, meublée de quenottes
luisantes et microscopiques. (80)

She is described from an overwhelmingly masculine perspective; the narrator prolongs her feminine qualities until she becomes almost a feminine caricature of fertility, made to invite male attention. In this manner, she is the twisted eventuality of Françoise: she uses her qualities to make money, a reflection of the commercialization of France's resources, managed by those who sell them at the best price rather than serving the needs of the country and maintaining loyalty. Rather than becoming a mother with these feminine qualities, the prostitute charges a fee and is compensated. Thus it is neither virtue, nor work that is compensated in this allegorical tale of France, but sin, according to the morals of the time.

Neither is it insignificant that she is also described physically in terms of fruits and meats, her overall appearance being "appétissante" (80). She is, in a similar way to Françoise, "carefully associated with the idea of food and feeding," (Chaplin 55) an object to be consumed by all those around her, by both the men and the women, though in different ways. Loiseau, the crass bourgeois, even goes so far as to propose to "faire comme sur le petit navire de la chanson: de manger le plus gras des voyageurs. Cette allusion indirecte à Boule de Suif choqua les gens bien élevés" (83). This direct reference to eating, paired with her own nickname, suggests that she is meant to be consumed, something that will be metaphorically accomplished before the story plays out.

During the first leg of the journey, the diverse members of the traveling party find themselves starving and in the middle of nowhere, and Elisabeth generously persuades

everyone to take part in her meal, which she produces from beneath her skirts. The imagery of fertility/ nourishment is undeniable, and rather comical when coupled with the comments of the bourgeois Loiseau, “Eh, parbleu, dans des cas pareils tout le monde est frère et doit s’aider” (87). The bourgeois is quick to advocate brotherly aid when it is someone else’s sacrifice, and when the situation involves satiating appetites. However, such a sentence becomes blatantly ironic when taken in context with the traveling plans of the group: abandon ship and head for England. Clearly the fate of the nation was not enough to incite brotherly aid and unification, however, the immediate satisfaction of an empty stomach elicits all manner of battle-ready rhetoric. Her generosity and willingness to respond to even the smallest inconvenience of her companions makes the succeeding betrayals all the more disgusting, as well as disturbing.

The beauty of this woman, in keeping with her imperfect nature and occupation, is far from idealized. In this account, it is no longer a question of a perfect woman, who we suspect was never innocent, even before the arrival of the Prussians. Maupassant does not leave us any comforting illusions of a lost paradise in this story. France, like this woman, was not without problems, but despite it all, she deserved to be protected and defended. After all, she shows many positive traits despite her obvious moral drawbacks, including her sincere generosity towards her fellow passengers rather than selfishly hoarding all of her food, as the others do in an act of extreme hypocrisy in the final scene of the book.

Even more impressive than her simple charity is her willingness to stand up to the enemy, in whatever form it takes. She was the only one of the whole party to have fought against the Prussians, the only one with the will to resist, the only one to have even

thought about resistance. As the others consume the contents of her basket, they feel compelled to politely listen to her bold declaration:

Oh, si j'étais un homme, allez! Je les regardais de ma fenêtre, ces gros porcs avec leur casque à pointe, et ma bonne me tenait les mains pour m'empêcher de leur jeter mon mobilier sur le dos. Puis il en est venu pour loger chez moi ; alors j'ai sauté à la gorge du premier. Ils ne sont pas plus difficiles à étrangler que d'autres! Et je l'aurais terminé, celui-là, si l'on ne m'avait pas tirée par les cheveux. Il a fallu me cacher après ça. Enfin, quand j'ai trouvé une occasion, je suis partie, et me voici. (88)

Her inspirational tirade prompts brief congratulations on her determination to act, but does not awaken any sense of guilt in her cowardly companions. She is the only one fleeing out of self-preservation, rather than selfish interest. Her life remains in danger as long as the Prussians are present, but her unfailing loyalty to her country is still evident.

Even the democrat, Cornudet, is merely a hypocrite underneath his bravado, trying to take advantage of every situation as much as possible. His character becomes progressively more ridiculous, especially as he is described during Elisabeth's speech as having "un sourire approbateur et bien veillant d'apôtre; de même un prêtre entend un dévôt louer Dieu, car les démocrates à longue barbe ont le monopole du patriotisme comme les hommes en soutane ont celui de la religion" (88). Maupassant clothes Cornudet's entire being in ridicule, continually criticizing a man (and a whole lifestyle) who ignores the needs of his country while supposedly preaching them, only to put himself in a position of optimal exploitation.

Cornudet is a democrat by profession, as he had already used all of the fortune inherited from his father, and now “il attendait impatientement la République [...] pour obtenir enfin la place méritée par tant de consommations révolutionnaires [meaning alcoholic consumption] ” (79). His only desire for the new régime was based solely in self-interest, not any deep-seated philosophical or nationalist beliefs in a better institution. His decision to abandon his country at the first sign of danger reflects this self-serving objective, as well as his effort to convince Boule de Suif to sleep with him—for the good of the nation, of course—and certainly without paying her. Above all else, he desires compensation from the Republic with no personal risk to deserve it, hence his organization of the defense and his lack of courage to carry it through personally. The juxtaposition of these two characters—the democrat who does nothing but expects everything, and the woman who acts but expects nothing in return—renders the prostitute more admirable, an effect heightened by a similar comparison with the other citizens who allow themselves to be guided by their own selfishness.

However, rather than ever being a source of pride and joy, as Zola’s Françoise was for her entire village, Elisabeth is scorned and abused by those who should faithfully stand beside her: her fellow “patriots.” Rather than supporting moral outrage at being asked to sleep with the commanding Prussian officer, as soon as the personal implications and inconveniences of such a decision begin to sink in, “on conspire” (111). Through every means available they persuade Boule de Suif to betray her own moral code, and foolishly she trusts them, thinking them to be sincere. The transition between a fertile country, a virtuous woman and a family that loves her and desires nothing more than her protection, to a cold, hard world and a prostitute surrounded by equally frozen individuals

who won't hesitate to send her to the guillotine transmits a potent message to the French readers of the time. The idealized France of the past cannot exist, nor did it ever, and the unwilling loss of innocence at the end of the text echoes France's need to let go of this crippling nostalgic vision in 1880, and instead become aware of the nation's current needs rather than shouting "victoire" when all lays in ruins. Furthermore, the overall attitude of self-interest and profiteering was the reality of the war, and to ignore this or sugar-coat it with pro-France nationalist rhetoric invites a denial of past faults as well as similar behavior in the future.

Depiction of the Enemy

The depiction of the enemy in respect to France, and consequently to the two women who personify their country, shows further similarities in approach between the two authors. The Prussian army is characterized as an "inflexible" presence without pity (Zola 58), their presence representing a violation of a feminine and fertile land, and the cause of ruin and the loss of innocence. In the Maupassant text, this idea is supported by strong imagery. From the very moment of their arrival, the masculinity of the Prussians invites an unflattering comparison with the French who have been "émasculés par le commerce, [qui] attendaient anxieusement les vainqueurs, tremblant qu'on ne considérât comme une arme leurs broches à rôtir ou leurs grands couteaux de cuisine" (69). The French wait, never thinking to use these tools as weapons. They take no initiative, and the invasion occurs without the slightest protest from the nervous inhabitants who wait "dans leurs chambres assombries" (70).

In addition to this obvious similarity between the two stories, there is a coherent evolution in the perspective from which the authors chose to represent the enemies throughout the stages of war: from distant to overwhelmingly active, present, and violent, as well as from completely external to internal. For Zola, the enemy begins as a joke, something so far removed from the idyllic existence of the village as to belong in another dimension, as with the war in general. “Cette idée que les Prussiens pouvaient venir parut une bonne plaisanterie. On allait leur flanquer une raclée soignée, et ce serait vite finie” (22). Their response takes on an almost childlike naiveté, calmly discussing the war while Françoise and Dominique dreamily hold hands for the first time.

The enemy in *L'Attaque du Moulin*

This dream is dispelled all too quickly, and the inhabitants of Rocreuse swiftly gain a clearer sense of the meaning of enemy. The rapid transition between considering the Prussian attack as some vague joke and suddenly considering them an immediate threat is treated almost mockingly by Zola through the immediacy of the transition between the last phrase of the chapter: “Jamais une paix plus large n’était descendue sur un coin plus heureux de nature” (23), and the first sentence of the next: “Un mois plus tard, jour pour jour, juste la veille de la Saint-Louis, Rocreuse était dans l’épouvante. [...] Bien sûr qu’ils tomberaient sur le village pendant la nuit et qu’ils égorgeraient tout le monde” (24). The fairy tale has transitioned into nightmare, but still maintaining a naïve view of the enemy. With this transition come an immediate difference in style and a change in the whole tone of the story, accelerating into rapid-fire action and immediate

decisions whereas the first chapter dwelt mainly in flashbacks as the storyline meandered towards the engagement celebration. The second chapter is based almost exclusively around minute to minute details of the Prussians invasion accompanied by the complete dependence of the French officer upon his watch, as though this chapter represents an awakening of a sleepy village, embedded in the values and traditions of the past, to the reality of the absurd war that suddenly surrounds them. This idea of interruption, awakening and realization comes again and again throughout the story: “Dans cet air endormi, brusquement un coup de feu éclata” (27).

The cruelty of the German army reveals itself throughout the story, culminating when the commanding officer places an inhuman decision upon the shoulders of Françoise: turn in the man she loves, or watch her father die. While contemplating her heart-breaking decision, “soldats prussiens passaient en riant. Certains lui jetaient des mots” (53), laughing at her painful circumstances. Even more striking: the vengeful execution of Dominique at the moment of the French “victory”. The Germans are set up as a perfectly despicable enemy, easily hated, who speaks “dans une langue effroyable” (35) and who clearly lacks the moral fiber to understand or sympathize with a man who takes up arms in the honest defense of his love and home (the Prussian officer asks “Pourquoi avez-vous pris les armes?... Tout ceci ne doit pas vous regarder” (36)).

However, alongside this enemy so easily accepted by Zola’s readers, another more controversial enemy presents itself: the French army. Once war arrives at the village doorstep, the “enemies” of Françoise and her family multiply: not only do the Prussians act mercilessly, but the French soldiers act unexpectedly worse. They bring destruction down upon this family by designating the mill as a temporary military

stronghold, thus implicating the family in the conflict (and the danger) without considering their loss or encouraging their safety in any way. To destroy the invaders, Françoise's father is happy to sacrifice. Branson remarks that for this author, characters can be considered as "heroes, or 'subjects' in narratological terms, although [...] they can exercise no influence whatsoever on the main events of the war and very little at even the microlevel" (120). This description aptly applies itself to the characters of *l'Attaque du Moulin*, since Dominique and the father sacrifice themselves voluntarily for their nation, though that nation proves to be naïve and lacking in experience against such a professional opponent. Furthermore, the French soldiers show themselves to be indifferent and unsympathetic in the extreme to these individual sacrifices, exacting them without thought though hesitant to do as much themselves.

As the French army is defending the mill, the soldiers remain totally apathetic to the destruction that they have caused and that they anticipate causing, whereas the Père Merlier risks his life to keep checking on his precious wheel, and Dominique is repeatedly injured while defending Françoise, an act of which the soldiers seem incapable. Meanwhile, "L'officier chantonnait d'un air indifférent" (28), calling out orders in a scuffle in which he feels no personal implication. As we continue to read Françoise as an allegorical figure of the nation, the sacrifice of a foreigner (Dominique being from Belgium) that loves and honors her becomes more striking when placed beside the example of the soldiers who endanger the entire family, but especially the fragile Françoise, without a second thought, if only to not lose face for a superior officer. The defense of country means nothing- the officers are not attempting to save the town or its inhabitants, but expect and accept the casualties they will inflict. They are not

defending the mill on any type of moral grounds, rather as a temporary point of defense that is being held because of orders, rather than logic. The French commander fights out of a desire to save face with his superior officer, not to protect the civilians from the coming onslaught. The inhabitants of the village seem to exist for the army's convenience, rather than to ensure the inhabitants' safety, signaling a significant breakdown in the overall military ideology that leads directly to the destruction of the mill and Françoise's loss.

Rather than working with nature, and common sense, the French officer continues to place the family in danger during a siege he knows they cannot sustain, rather than retreat before the appointed time. "Il avait promis à ses chefs d'arrêter l'ennemi là jusqu'au soir, et il n'aurait pas reculé d'une semelle avant l'heure qu'il avait fixée pour la retraite" (34). Good sense clearly plays no role in the "strategy" employed by this French regiment. Though Dominique is wounded, and the French soldiers are more than aware that any civilian involved in combat would be put to death by the Prussian army, they continue to encourage him to shoot, pushing him towards his own execution in a meaningless skirmish so that they might save face. Finally, "à six heures précises, il consentit enfin à faire sortir ses hommes par une petite porte qui donnait sur une ruelle [...] Amusez-les....Nous reviendrons" (35). They feel no shame in escaping out the back door and running from the enemy, only in not following orders. Influenced only by social and superficial forces, the behavior of the French army displays a disturbing lack of the inner desire to protect and defend that Dominique embodies so perfectly: "Il tirait toujours, n'entendant rien, ne comprenant rien. Il n'éprouvait que le besoin de défendre Françoise" (35).

Through Dominique's heroism, Zola points out the irony that the only persons punished in this scenario were those who displayed actual patriotism, who embodied the dearly held notion of the "peasants up in arms." In fact, it was precisely the "levée en masse" (36) that the Germans feared, which led them to create the martial law that "tout Français n'appartenant pas à l'armée régulière et pris les armes à la main, devait être fusillé. Les compagnies franches elles-mêmes n'étaient pas reconnues comme belligérantes" (36). This ironic legislation successfully squelched any mass support of the French army, an unfortunate victory, given that, historically, the overall strategy of the French national defense for this war depended on the intervention of mass numbers of patriotic volunteers. This romantic and idealized projection of actual conflict, where the citizens rise up in the defense of their beloved *Patrie* failed to materialize into a Delacroix painting.

Dominique, a foreigner, and her father, a relic of the past, represent the only two who do rise up in defense of Françoise, and in a dramatic final scene, the mill, their home, the strength and pride of the city, actually come under attack *by the French army*. As they attack the villagers' own stronghold, they cavalierly take their lives (the père Merlier was killed by a stray bullet) and destroy their livelihood, aware that they are attacking their own citizens, continuing the destruction after the victory has been assured and the Prussians dead or in flight. However, as it is the possession of the place, not its value, that is important to the army, the skirmish ranks as a roaring victory for the French.

Nothing could be more ironic than the entrance of the same French officer who doomed Françoise to this fate from the beginning by his self-absorption and uncaring

attitude for the consequences of the soldiers' actions. "Et, apercevant Françoise imbécile entre les cadavres de son mari et de son père, au milieu des ruines fumantes du moulin, il la salua galamment de son épée en criant "Victoire! victoire! " (63). He hefts a sword, a weapon that was clearly not used during the actual attack which relied exclusively upon firearms and long range weaponry. That he would wield his sword "galamment" points us towards the symbolism of such a weapon, hearkening back to the exclusive rights of nobility to its ownership, an image complying with the overall character of the French officer: obviously more concerned with his status, an impressive entrance, and the observance of social niceties than the well-being of the countryside he is meant to protect. Wanting to be heroic, he seems unaware that the true heroes are lying in the dust of the French attack.

The enemy in *Boule de suif*

In Zola, the sleepy countryside is shaken by the arrival of her enemies, awakening to a cold reality: patriotism is dead, and the nation is essentially abandoned by friend and foe, left to fend for herself in a hopeless situation. In Maupassant, we see a continuation of the same atmosphere. Our heroes are dead, and no one is willing to fill their shoes. We understand as we read these two stories as a chronological portrayal of the war that men of honor die, and it is only those who negotiate, sell, and compromise who keep their lives. Our introduction to the tale of *Boule de Suif* is a bleak summary of the war situation. While Zola spends pages lovingly detailing the landscape, the earth and her natural riches, Maupassant plunges us into the scene of a crime: the return of soldiers and citizens who have let their country down. Throughout this story, we perceive the qualities

of the adversary especially as they are revealed by the weaknesses of the French. No specific characters are introduced, just “des hordes débandées. Les hommes avaient la barbe longue et sale, des uniformes en guenilles, et ils avançaient d’une allure molle, sans drapeau, sans régiment” (67). Maupassant’s tone is essentially satirical, presenting a sad summary of the defeated French army as they retreat: “des petits moblots alertes, faciles à l’épouvante et prompts à l’enthousiasme, prêts à l’attaque comme à la fuite ; puis, au milieu d’eux, quelques culottes rouges, débris d’une division moulue dans une grande bataille” (67). It is clear that the author thinks little of their service in this war, especially the “culottes rouges” who are relegated to a small minority, hardly the glorious return of the national troops that gave their all and yet failed. Maupassant’s intention to avoid “l’enthousiasme faux jugé jusqu’ici nécessaire dans toute narration où se trouvent une culotte rouge et un fusil” is thus immediately apparent—this story will not be an easy read for the French nationalist of 1880.

The painting of this bleak and basically lifeless scene builds the anticipation and creates a dramatic foil for the arrival of the Prussians. Though both texts deal with the anticipation of this arrival, there lies a crucial difference in the attitude adopted by the French citizens. In Zola, they are preparing for defense, and the père Merlier mentions how glad he is that Dominique is a foreigner, for he will be able to protect his daughter if the time comes. In this second story, however, they are waiting, hoping not to cause a stir, hoping to be overlooked, hiding their uniforms, burying any outward signs of patriotism, a sure sign of an interior lack. There is no thought to resist, only to survive, to hope that the enemy will be merciful. They only wish to avoid any personal sacrifice or discomfort, as shown in the general sentiment that “l’angoisse de l’attente faisait désirer

la venue de l'ennemi ” (69), this sentence also serving to foreshadow the ease with which they would welcome and accept the Prussian occupation. The courage that was manifest by the people of Rocreuse, the personal implication in the fighting has been lost, and everyone feels that they have done “enough”. The irony of the passing legions “aux appellations héroïques : ‘les Vengeurs de la Défaite – les Citoyens de la Tombe – les Partageurs de la Mort’ ” who go by with “des airs de bandits ” (68) serves to remind everyone that they have escaped death, cheated their country and evaded honor. They have stolen the titles with no merit to wear them.

Furthermore, before the arrival of the Prussian force in the text, every verb is in the imperfect or pluperfect form, creating an atmosphere of waiting, a hazy atmosphere where no definitive action takes place. When the German armies arrive, however, there is an immediate and stark contrast in the writing style, where the first verbs in the simple past appear, a distinct transition and a violent disturbance of the scene established by Maupassant. This violent insertion into the text, into the city, foreshadows the rape that Boule de suif is eventually forced to consent to. This association with action and violence characterizes the Prussian characters throughout this story, whereas the French continually choose to play the waiting game, to be acted upon and react rather than take any positive action themselves. The exception, of course, is Boule de suif.

Our first introduction to the Prussian army creates a distinct contrast with the French military exodus. The French army arrives in rags, without formation, while the invaders arrive with advance scouts, and suddenly “une masse noire descendit de la côte Sainte-Catherine, tandis que deux autres flots envahisseurs apparaissaient par les routes de Darnetal et de Bois-guillaume. Les avant-gardes de trois corps, juste au meme

moment, se joignirent sur la place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville; et, par toutes les rues voisines, l'armée allemande arrivait, déroulant ses bataillons qui faisaient sonner les pavés sous leur pas dur et rythmé" (69). The German army arrives, a totally foreign agent to the French situation: they are completely unified in their arrival, well-planned, and perfectly coordinated, arriving at the Hôtel-de-Ville, the place of authority both real and symbolic, at exactly the same moment, automatically assuming control. Even the noise of their footsteps is perfectly controlled and continuous. Every act performed by the invading army reveals a completely different method from the French: they are in motion, they are loud, they are unified. The French are paralyzed, silent, and hiding. The imagery depicts a situation of clear and immediate domination.

The imagery associating the French with passivity and death, and the Prussians with action and life is also apparent: "Des commandements criés d'une voix inconnue et gutturale montaient le long des maisons qui semblaient mortes et désertes, tandis que, derrière les volets fermés, des yeux guettaient ces hommes victorieux, maîtres de la cité, des fortunes et des vies par le 'droit de la guerre'" (70). The houses become tomb-like structures, a cemetery of once-living structures that are now inhabited only by "des yeux". Reducing the citizens to "eyes" reinforces the passivity of their role: they have clearly forsaken the use of any other potentially dangerous—or aggressive—faculty in these circumstances. They are perfectly willing to allow any personal control over their security to dissipate, so that "tout ce que protégeaient les lois des hommes ou celles de la nature se trouve à la merci d'une brutalité inconsciente et féroce" (70). They would rather not arouse any possibility of a reprisal than defend what they have: the preference to rely

on another's mercy than their own strength is a debilitating state, and one historically associated with the female role.

A general lack of action is most apparent—paradoxically—when the small French group is finally trying to act: to betray their nation and relocate to England. Throughout this entire exodus, they are continually forced to wait, immobile and indecisive. At the beginning of their journey, they must wait in freezing temperatures for the coach to be ready. “Les bourgeois gelés s'étaient tus; ils demeuraient immobiles et roidis” (74). Again, the imagery of still, frozen, death aptly describes the general French situation, and especially that of the French patriotic spirit. Never acting for themselves, instead they choose to rely upon the Germans they have befriended and manipulated to facilitate their escape. They willingly put themselves in the position of the weak, with Maupassant showing every action to have an ulterior motive that inevitably comes back to self-preservation or profit, with the sole inconvenience of having forsaken any personal liberty or responsibility for their situation. The impossibly slow coach that never ceases to mire in the snow, the almost lame horse, and their inability to make any progress can be read as a symbolic consequence of their lack of personal liberty—they have willingly placed themselves in a position of dependency and must now deal with their own incapacities.

This passive quality continues throughout the opening scenes of the occupation. Though the city begins to come back to life, “Les Français ne sortaient guère encore, mais les soldats prussiens grouillaient dans les rues” (71). Once again, the Prussians are the source of life and movement, just as when they first entered the city: “Mais à chaque porte des petits détachements frappaient, puis disparaissaient dans les maisons. C'était

l'occupation après l'invasion" (70). There is an active violation of the privacy of each French home, though interestingly enough, the text leaves space between the action of "knocking" and "disappearing" inside, definitely leaving room to believe that the residents had the opportunity to allow the Prussians to enter, rather than undergoing a forced entry. The visual effect of hordes of Prussian armies being allowed to enter and violate this most sacred and protected space again reiterates the passive position of the French people, and helps us understand how the representative cross-section of French society stuck at the inn of Tôtes could encourage Boule de suif to do the same, though in more physical terms.

This feminization of the French people and their subsequent victimization are echoed in the treatment of the French landscape itself. Fields all across the countryside lie in a state of ruin, rendered sterile and unproductive by the enemy invasion, contributing to the famines and sufferings of the French people. Mme Follenvie, the wife of the innkeeper in Tôtes, decries the blatant misuse of French territory by the Germans. "Et si vous les voyiez faire l'exercice pendant des heures et des jours; ils sont là tous dans un champ: –et marche en avant, et marche en arrière, et tournez par ci, et tournez par-là. – S'ils cultivaient la terre au moins, ou s'ils travaillaient aux routes dans leur pays! –Mais non, madame, ces militaires ça n'est profitable à personne!" (96). Instead of producing harvests, the fertile lands of France now submit to the domination of the Prussians, who pervert the land to the use of learning how to make war on people rather than feed them. The maneuvers and endless drills of the regiments that thrash and trample land are a violation of the earth, just as the domineering presence of the Prussian army is a violation of the pride of the entire country. The victimization of France, through this powerful

allegorical imagery, becomes even more deplorable, shaming the attitudes that allowed it to happen.

The description of the commanding officer in Tôtes also plays a distinct role as a personification of this opposition between male and female metaphors. As the group arrives in the village of Tôtes, they meet the man who will control their lives over the next three days:

Un grand jeune homme excessivement mince et blond, serré dans son uniforme comme une fille en son corset, et portant sur le côté sa casquette plate et cirée [...] Sa moustache démesurée, à longs poils droits, s'amincissant indéfiniment de chaque côté et terminée par un seul fil blond si mince qu'on n'en apercevait pas la fin, semblait peser sur les coins de sa bouche, et, tirant la joue, imprimait aux lèvres un pli tombant.

(91)

Whereas Boule de suif is described in terms of everything feminine, exaggeratedly rounded, and compared to objects to be consumed, the description of the officer dwells on his male characteristics, his almost inhuman thinness, his hyperbolic exactness in dress and the harsh planes that compose his figure. The focus on his mustache, an obviously male trait, as well as his excessive height, present a phallic image that is not only distinct from the form of Elisabeth, but all of her companions, as "l'entassement des lourds vêtements d'hiver faisait ressembler tous ces corps à des curés obèses" (73). They are soft, effeminate, and obedient to his every whim; he is severe, masculine, and authoritative.

Though the Prussians are hardly spoken of in glowing terms, Maupassant, as well as Zola, takes care to describe similarities between the natives and their oppressors, despite their enmity. Françoise sees the Prussian soldier that she encouraged Dominique to kill in a very sympathetic light, finally picturing the conflict from the enemy perspective, while the citizens under the Prussian occupation of Maupassant do not take long to recognize the humanity of the Prussian officers. “Du reste, les officiers de hussards bleus, qui traînaient avec arrogance leurs grands outils de mort sur le pave, ne semblaient pas avoir pour les simples citoyens énormément plus de mépris que les officiers de chasseurs, qui, l’année d’avant, buvaient aux mêmes cafés” (71). This sympathetic portrayal is important, as the demonization of the enemy was a common tactic and an easy trap of texts concerning war, especially when the authors’ own nation is involved. However, both armies are shown to have almost equal disregard for human life in Zola, and an almost equal amount of arrogance and lack of personal dignity in Maupassant. In fact the most positive portrayal of a constructive society are the Prussian soldiers who have quietly adapted to living and working in Tôtes, attempting to be productive and helpful despite their role. The desire to produce texts that could be considered not “antipatriotique, mais simplement vrai” (Maupassant) is again shown through these attempts to keep a lid on personal or nationalist sentiments of the war.

In this spirit of impartiality and frankness, the issue of greed, a preponderant theme throughout this story and the general motivation for French behavior, is shown to be common on both sides of the border. The Prussians were not merely keeping the peace throughout the occupation, but their main purpose was the extortion of gross sums of money. “Les vainqueurs exigeaient de l’argent, beaucoup d’argent. Les habitants

payaient toujours; ils étaient riches d'ailleurs. Mais plus un négociant normand devient opulent et plus il souffre de tout sacrifice, de toute parcelle de sa fortune qu'il voit passer aux mains d'un autre" (72). Maupassant is not merely commenting on behavior during the abnormal situation of occupation, rather, he is describing the spread of a general tendency of avarice and greed, an inability to part with monetary substance that virtually paralyzed the French system and doomed them to failure from the outset of this war. In reference to Elisabeth, Davey asserts that the presence of prostitution itself is a tool of Maupassant "pour comprendre la "manie" de la consommation qui a tellement marqué la société bourgeoise dont nous sommes les héritiers" (60) in a metaphorical equation of consumerism and the sexual consumption of women.

Historical evidence for this commentary on the materialism of French citizens and the consequent paralysis of the French response during the Franco-Prussian war is not difficult to find. As one historian explains, though the government attempted to raise funds for the development of a standing army, the general populace was so unforthcoming, both in volunteers and in substance, that they were handicapped, unable to meet the need they saw as Prussia gained in strength and numbers (Wawro 45). In fact, one of the only main sources of funding for the war effort was through a lottery held annually by the French war ministry which "reaped handsome profits selling exemptions to frightened draftees" (45). This example of blatant exploitation, going so far as to sacrifice the quality and integrity of the national forces by the French army itself, exemplified the nationwide shift towards unethical profiteering and the abandonment of the values and ideals that had sustained them through the wars and revolutions of the past. Money and greed have therefore become enemies of the nation itself.

The overarching concern with money is shown in a mocking light to be a new form of patriotism, one which the French go to excessive lengths to protect and secure. As we meet the various members of the party escaping to Le Havre, the men are instantly unified by their social and economic similarities. “Ils se sentaient frères par argent, de la grande franc-maçonnerie de ceux qui possèdent, qui font sonner de l’or en mettant la main dans la poche de leur culotte” (81). They are unified by commerce, not by their country. They feel obligated to give nothing, only to collect, and they are not going to Le Havre to support the last ditch efforts of the army, but rather to take what they can and escape. A humorous example of the primacy of money comes during the tirade of Mme Follenvie (the hostess of the inn): “Elle raconta toutes ses impressions à l’arrivée des Prussiens [...] les exécrant d’abord parce qu’ils lui coûtaient de l’argent, et, ensuite, parce qu’elle avait deux fils à l’armée” (95). The financial ramifications of the war seem to take precedence over the potential loss of her two sons—a curious prioritization, yet one that is reiterated as the small group considers the reasons behind their forced delay in Tôtes, and it is only at the thought of “une rançon considerable” that “une panique les affola” (104). “Ils se creusaient la tête pour découvrir des mensonges acceptables, dissimuler leurs richesses, se faire passer pour pauvres, très pauvres” (104). The fact that they are under an unreasonable Prussian’s jurisdiction who could order their deaths at any moment seems unimportant next to the security of their riches. They are willing to do whatever is necessary to protect them. The juxtaposition of their general panic at the thought of being forced to hand over any of their money in order to gain their freedom with their complete acceptance and approval of Boule de suif—their compatriot and

fellow traveler—handing over her pride, virtue, and honor for the same goal renders this mentality horrifying.

Money as a new form of enmity towards true patriotism is evident from the beginning of the occupation. Rather than thinking of ways to resist, “le besoin du négoce travailla de nouveau le cœur des commerçants du pays” (73) The core of the French citizen has ceased to harbor desires to defend the country, or resonate with the need to expel the invaders. Their hearts are touched only by money and commerce, stifling any patriotic sense of duty. The sense of personal responsibility has evolved far from the stalwart patriotism – for a country that was not even his own – of Dominique’s character that would not allow him to collaborate with the German army, preferring death to such treason, or from that of the père Merlier, who is willing to give up everything he has spent a lifetime building, knowing his possessions are doomed once the French army occupies them. After the arrival of the Prussians, the citizens of Rouen believe that “le devoir commençait pour les vaincus de se montrer gracieux envers les vainqueurs” (70). “Le devoir” here is one that is perceived for reasons of personal safety and profit, rather than any deep-seated loyalty to their country.

From Patriotism to Nationalism

It is important to note that, beyond mere commercial concerns, there is a general shift from patriotism to nationalism in these two stories: from the internalization of concern for the national welfare to an external show of these values, without any personal implication. Not only do the actions of Zola’s French citizens manifest a need to love and

protect their country, they also experience a deep connection with the land itself, working closely with the earth and dependent upon it for their livelihood. With Maupassant, however, we see a nation of citizens who live disconnected from the land, which lies dormant beneath their feet. All of the characters make their living through commerce with other men, rather than depending upon nature to sustain them. This is evident when the travelers in the coach are starving and seek food, but can find nothing, as “le paysan défiant cachait ses réserves dans la crainte d’être pillé par les soldats qui, n’ayant rien à se mettre sous la dent, prenaient par force ce qu’ils découvraient” (82). The land is no longer a source of nourishment for the people. The idea of a France that produces and provides for her citizens is out of date, the people’s concept having evolved towards self reliance. Therefore, the idea of the nation as source of all bounty that was so prevalent through the preceding centuries no longer functions. While these modern French citizens appreciate Boule de suif momentarily for her contributions, she no longer fits in their schema of the economic world. She is an old archetype, the embodiment of generosity, fertility, and sincerity, who cannot survive in this hard, frozen world.

The deep, organic patriotism that is ubiquitous in *L’attaque du Moulin* has therefore been replaced by the pursuit of commercial gain, as well as overt displays of nationalism, as we witness in the character of the hypocrite Cornudet. This “democrat” manifests all of the outward traits of a true servant of his country. He eloquently elaborates on the duties of the citizen, stating self-righteously to the rest of the group that “la guerre est une barbarie quand on attaque un voisin paisible; c’est un devoir sacré quand on defend la patrie” (97). However, he adopts a peculiar hands-off approach to the care and defense of his own country that seems paradoxical with his entire lifestyle.

Having prepared the defenses of his country, he convinces himself to run from the front lines to be “useful” elsewhere. He excels at declarations, such as his explosion after the capitulation of Elisabeth “je vous dis à tous que vous venez de faire une infamie!” (120), yet, he does nothing at all to thwart the conspiring of his companions to convince her to do so, possibly because her continued refusal held implications for his freedom as well. In the final scene, we see a culmination of his personal betrayal under the pretense of nationalism which Flaubert, Maupassant’s mentor, lauded ecstatically: “Et la fin! La pauvre fille qui pleure pendant que l'autre chante la *marseillaise*, sublime !” (Flaubert, *Lettre*).

Boule de suif sobs as she comprehends the absolute betrayal of the group, starving and ignored, while Cornudet alternates between singing and whistling the Marseillaise, the very song that had just been chosen as the national anthem in the year this story was published. Maupassant creates a scene of supreme irony as Cornudet continues “avec une obstination féroce, son sifflement vengeur et monotone, contraignant les esprits las et exaspérés à suivre le chant d’un bout à l’autre, à se rappeler chaque parole qu’ils appliquaient sur chaque mesure” (126). Though he thinks to remind others of their guilt in Boule de suif’s suffering, as well as their abandonment of the country, he does not think to share his food or conversation with her either, and his supposed sympathy has done nothing to improve her situation. The use of this particular anthem, a song so obviously related to the nationalist tendencies of 1880, is a direct prod at the nationalist tendency to follow Cornudet’s example: being so caught up in the outward signs of nationalism while allowing the *Patrie* to suffer, actually contributing to her suffering. Too busy propping up his nationalist ego and showing all the right motives, Cornudet

misses every opportunity to be of real service to the woman sitting next to him, seemingly unaware of his share in the guilt in abandoning her and his country. His example thus serves as a warning of the self-deceptive quality of the trappings of nationalism, which allow one to feel like a defender of national honor while remaining completely passive and ineffectual, joining the traitors to everything that constitute patriotism as Maupassant describes it in *La Horla*: “Ces profondes et délicates racines qui attachent un homme à la terre où sont nés ses aïeux, qui l’attachent à ce que l’on pense et à ce que l’on mange, aux usages comme aux nourritures, aux locutions locales, aux intonations des paysans, aux odeurs du sol, des villages et de l’air lui-même” (qtd. in “Maupassant” 826).

Through the allegorical readings of these stories, the obvious shift from the idea of the French nation and her embodiment from pre-war France to the France of the Prussian occupation comes to light, bringing with it a whole range of social, economical, and national repercussions. Zola and Maupassant both create an allegorical relationship linking the landscape of France, their female protagonist, and the various forms that the enemy assumes, all to show a general degeneration of French patriotism and allegiance. The transition from a deeply patriotic people that feels physically connected to their land in Zola to a money-grubbing, self-serving, profiteering population in Maupassant becomes a more effective criticism when the victims of this degeneration are not merely a faceless nation, but rather anthropomorphized as women in need of the protection of those around them. From the innocence of Françoise to the worldliness of Elisabeth, both female figures are in some way naive, receiving a harsh education from an uncaring and unaware foe, who wears both the Prussian and French uniform, a patent departure from

the perspective of the standard war-related material being churned out at the time. The effectiveness of such a use of allegory, as well as the distinct relevance of such a choice in the year 1880, and its political, social, and artistic implications, will be the subject of further chapters.

Conventional Allegory and Application within *Les Soirées de Médan*

In the preceding chapter, we explored allegorical interpretations of *L'attaque du Moulin* and *Boule de suif*, the first two stories published in *les Soirées de Médan*. At a time of nationalist intensity, these stories appear in complete opposition to the dominant trend, presenting narratives devoid of the euphemistic perspective so apparent in the other literature of the day.³ Through these allegories, an obvious shift between the idealized pre-war France and the harsh realities of France under the Prussian occupation became apparent, an effective way of transmitting a message difficult to swallow. Thus, from the general perspective of the narrative, we have determined that the choice of allegory was an effective one, but what is the inherent strength of allegory as a rhetorical device? Why is it particularly effective to represent "France" as a woman? What implications do female allegories carry? Is this an image that readers would have understood, or merely a result of erudite study? Given the historical context, how did allegory fit as an appropriate tool to combat the nationalist trend and fulfill the objectives the Médanistes set for themselves? How do these two allegories compare and relate to contemporary

³ Ouriel Reschef explains the characteristics of the literature produced about the Franco-Prussian war, as mentioned in the Introduction : "De nombreux auteurs ont souligné que, battus dans les batailles rangées, les Français en sont venus à exalter la lutte "partisane" de "guérilla" des gardes mobiles, et l'héroïsme individuel face à la "machine de guerre" prussienne. Ce fut un véritable foisonnement d'histoires soi-disant authentiques, où la débrouillardise et le courage faisaient victorieusement face dans des escarmouches sans importance, si ce n'est pour donner aux Français une satisfaction d'amour-propre: refus de regarder la réalité en face, inclination à se réfugier dans un monde de rêve où l'on pourrait redistribuer les cartes, où individualisme et valeur personnelle rétabliraient l'équilibre en faveur de la France" (Reschef 59). Not only was this escapist tendency apparent in literature, it played a role in the public media as well: "La production caricaturale de la guerre franco-prussienne exprime avec acuité -- avec pathétique -- un intense besoin d'évasion" (87).

female allegorical representation? In answering these questions, the reasoning behind the use of allegory at this time, along with its critical implications within the *Médan* texts will aid in understanding not only the texts themselves, but the general climate of political expression around 1880, the dawn of the Third Republic.

The Value of Allegory

To determine the rhetorical value of allegory, we will first consider some of its most pertinent functions and effects. As Doreen Innes explains, Cicero, the oft-proclaimed “father of rhetoric,” saw metaphor and allegory (or extended metaphor, as he considered it) as a special ability “to extend the listener’s thought in a different but purposeful direction” (14). As a further indication of such a use of language and imagery, “Platonist commentators on the ancient poets appear to have believed that allegory, far from adorning their meaning, was often the *only* means available for expressing what needed to be said” (Boys-Stones 3). Thus allegory is a mark of rhetorical genius to lead a reader (or listener) through a text endowed with an additional layer of meaning, a second direction of interpretation. Furthermore, the meaning they are able to convey through this system is made more attainable through this mode of transmission. The message of poisoned patriotism and degeneration perpetuated by the two anti-nationalist texts written by Zola and Maupassant would thus lose its effectiveness if presented under any other form: a manifesto alone would not have achieved the desired effect, for who would read it besides concerned intellectuals? The artistic elite? Presenting such a politically charged

message through a fictional account assured a wide audience, clear and clever allegorical writing ensured a sobered one.

Though allegory is generally associated with an idealized religious arena, allegorization does not necessitate idealization: it is merely a manner of expressing something that cannot be shown directly, for to directly represent the meaning is to state the obvious and lose the effectiveness of the message. Paul de Man asked “Why is it that the furthest reaching truths about ourselves and the world have to be stated in such a lopsided, referentially indirect mode?” (qtd. in Clayson 116). The “furthest reaching truths” to which he refers are embedded in the allegory, a versatile medium that lends itself to a multiplicity of meanings and connotations, allowing the author to communicate on several levels with the reader, who reads multiple stories simultaneously.

A third element of allegory that lends itself to wider expressive possibilities is the association of an abstract idea with the power of an image. As Agulhon states concerning a three-dimensional allegorical figure, “le monument parle à la fois par l’image et par l’inscription” (*Marianne au Pouvoir* 75). The same concept clearly applies to literature: both the story, as well as the figure chosen to act within the story, communicate a message. In Zola’s *L’attaque du moulin*, we understand that the French army has abandoned logic and courage in their disastrous mistreatment of the French territory, but the fact that a beautiful, innocent woman loses everything, her hopes crushed and her needs ignored by the French, communicates a deeper betrayal of the nation than can be expressed through the defeat of an amorphous France. The importance of this association with an image is reaffirmed continually throughout this political period in France, swinging opinions and sustaining campaigns. “Une chose bien établie, c’est

que l'imagerie a beaucoup compté dans les luttes politiques du siècle" (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 236).

Female Allegory

Beyond the inherent value of allegory as a mode of discourse, using a woman as an allegorical figure carries its own strengths and implications. As Madelyn Gutwirth explains, "the fact is that female allegory thrives on the multiplicity of meanings men have attached to the female sex" (qtd. in Clayson 121). We will therefore look at the major meanings attached to the female sex, and their effect on the readings of these texts. As both of the allegories within this study are created by men, for a society that could easily be considered male-dominated,⁴ it seems logical that these female allegories would reflect both male associations with the female gender as well as their traditional social role. As evidence of this fact, we turn to the royal palace of Fontainebleau in the early 1500s, whose architecture was an indicator of royal taste and judgment. As Rebecca Zorach explains, it "strongly emphasizes both femininity and natural abundance, identifying one with the other [...]. Even more striking, as we have seen, are the omnipresent stuccoes of female nudes holding baskets and garlands of fruit, their bodies

⁴ Lynn Hunt affirms this sentiment, describing the condition of women, stating, "The proliferation of the female allegory was made possible...by the exclusion of women from public affairs. Women could be representative of abstract qualities and collective dreams because women were not allowed to vote or govern" (qtd. in Clayson 121). Though this statement pertains to the French Revolution, these rights and conditions had not changed at the time *les Soirées de Médan* were written, as Alain Corbin affirms through discussing the dependence of women. He states that Michelet, Jules Simon, and Zola all showed that "dans la ville du XIX^e siècle, la femme ne peut vivre sans l'homme. Les spécialistes de l'histoire de l'industrie aussi bien que ceux de l'histoire féminine ou prostitutionnelle s'en déclarent, eux aussi, convaincus" (*Le temps* 94).

literally bearing the abundant products of nature” (84). The idea of associating women with fertility and abundance, given the physical role of motherhood, is apparent in both texts. There is Françoise, who “devait finir par être ronde et friande comme une caille,”(18) and then Elisabeth, whose figure is “une pomme rouge,” (80) and who produces a basket of plenty for the whole carriage from beneath her skirts. Both are described in terms of natural abundance, an idea closely linked with fertility.

These concepts fit both characters nicely into a traditional female allegorical representation, a tradition which both authors then proceed to twist, or, in the case of *Boule de suif*, pervert. This traditional idea of abundance stems, according to Zorach, from an idea of inexhaustible maternal wealth.

The maternal wealth of these bodies is linked to a notion of natural wealth as infinitely renewable, as if no labor were required to bring forth the earth’s production, as if no damage to the earth were possible, as if these maternal bodies were capable of giving endlessly without cost [...] Not only is women’s labor effaced, in allegorical analogies between the earth and women’s bodies; labor itself disappears when the fruits of the earth are thought of as pure gifts of natural abundance. In the figure of the maternal earth, a variety of significations also come together: sacred, maternal, erotic, national. (124)

The association with a female earth is therefore rich in implications for allegorical characters. Females produce, as does the land, in their maternal function. While the idea of the effortless natural production exists in Zola (the river—nature—turns the wheel of

the mill, the landscape is rich and abundant), its personification in Françoise leads to violence rather than fertility. She loses her source of origin—her connection to the land—with the death of her father and the destruction of the mill, as well as all possibility of literal offspring with the death of Dominique, the only man she swore she would ever marry.⁵ In the end she has ultimately lost all “natural wealth.”

The character of Boule de suif also becomes more interesting when associated with the “maternal earth” figure. She effortlessly produces a seemingly endless stream of bounty for the passengers, but the cost of her generosity is very steep: rather than glorified for her allegorical role as provider, she is demanded to abase herself, converting the very physical mechanism that should lead to fertility into an act of violence. Her generosity, her whole persona as abundant France is an outdated concept: the passengers look to themselves to provide, not to the land, not to their country. In a land where commerce dominates and personal independence is the key to fortune, the concept of a nation generating all of the wealth has become inapplicable. In the end, she is left, bereft, starving, the antithesis of the productive earth, trying to play a traditional role in a modern France. She is a relic of a past era, when portliness was a mark of nobility rather than a sign of the low and uncouth, the uncontrolled appetite being an unfortunate flaw for which she is mocked rather than an indication of God’s blessings poured out upon the land. Both of these characters gain depth and tragedy when taken in context of the traditional role played by female allegory. The partial adherence to allegorical tradition,

⁵ “Françoise avait déclaré au père Merlier qu’elle aimait Dominique et que jamais elle ne consentirait à épouser un autre garçon” (Zola 19).

coupled with drastic departures make the tales an even more piercing narrative, and as such, an even more successful stab at nationalism.

Further implications of using female allegory emerge when considering the inherent religious underpinnings of allegorical forms, especially given the deep religious tradition of the French people, and the strong precedent for the worship of female figures. The underlying link between allegory and religion stems from its biblical presence and its dominant role as a method of interpretation and representation that characterized Christianity throughout the middle ages. Though the Catholic Church had suffered strong blows through the secularizing legislation of the 19th century, provincial sculpture in the 1850s and 60s was still “massivement religieuse” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 169). In 1863, the ecclesiastical dignitary Poupelier stated, “Mais rien n’est comparable aux témoignages de foi et de piété par lesquels les enfants de la France cherchent à honorer la très sainte et immaculée Vierge Marie”(169). The significant increase in Mariolatry during this period indicates an ease and fundamental familiarity with female divinity. Especially given the similar trend in allegorical sculptural representations of the nation and the Republic (Marianne) that appeared alongside religious sculpture throughout this same period, the rapprochement of these two feminine ideals is not a stretch.

In writing in allegorical form, Maupassant and Zola were drawing on a rich tradition in both secular and theological circles. The tradition of associating women in allegorical literature with Marie or Eve could serve as yet another strategy to enhance the irony and horror of the final scenes of our heroines, and the country they represent. Françoise, an innocent virgin, has effectively been cast alone out of the Garden of Eden (due in part to her own poor choice, but mostly to the senseless fighting of uncaring

troops). Without hope of “replenishing the earth,” she, with the land that surrounds her, is now barren, increasing the hopelessness of France’s situation: the paradise of the nostalgic past has been lost, and France must now rebuild, alone. On the other hand, Boule de suif, without pretense of innocence, stands as an allegorical anti-Marie, the perversion of feminine purity first of her own volition, then by the pressure of her self-serving companions. Her association with Marie through her allegorical role intensifies disgust for the depth to which the nation has fallen, as well as the citizen’s role in her fall. The inherent religious nature of allegory thereby lends another element of richness and personality to the plot.

Finally, by using female allegory, there is an inescapable notion of the erotic imported with the feminine into both texts. Zorach explains how the role of visual female allegory must necessarily involve the erotic, as they generally are represented in an exposed, sexually exaggerated way:

Many visual personifications from the renaissance onward present what appears to be a decorporealized figure in classicizing trappings, a purely ornamental body yoked to a concept by means of an attribute or a label. These figures are female, so the theory goes, simply because the grammatical gender of the concepts they represent is feminine. Yet isn’t there a reason why figures of personification are represented as erotic objects? (123)

Though presented more subtly, the concept of presenting an erotic subject matter is present most clearly in Boule de suif, when Elisabeth becomes the object of erotic jokes

and comments throughout the latter part of the text, especially while she is submitting to the Prussian soldier. In a manner of speaking, she has exposed herself socially in order to benefit everyone but herself. She becomes an object of physical desire for Cornudet and one of physical appetite for Loiseau, who proposed they eat “le plus gras des voyageurs” (83). This association of a physical and lustful desire culminating in the abuse of an allegorical female character *representing the French nation* augments the readers’ disgust with the behavior of the French citizens, particularly the democrat who purports to be her friend and protector.

The implicit characteristics of allegory, as well as those that accompany female allegory, thus elucidate further the choice of representing the French nation as a female allegory. The precedence of doing so, as well as the fundamental characteristics that typify this tradition, will give further insight into the method of Zola and Maupassant and the logic of their choice.

Precedence for France as Female Allegory

The tradition of female allegory extends well beyond the history of the French nation.⁶ “C’est la vieille tradition gréco-latine de l’allégorie, depuis longtemps codifiée à l’usage des artistes : mettre des corps humains pour représenter des choses abstraites ou

⁶ In discussing the history of the allegorical representation of France, I do not intend to give a complete account of this form of representation. Rather, I wish to present the reader with a sufficient yet brief overview of the allegorical developments throughout French history, so that the allegories in question may be considered in context. In order to provide this summary, I will be relying heavily upon Maurice Agulhon, who has produced extensive research regarding allegorical representation in France, concentrating especially on that of the Republic.

lointaines” (Agulhon, *Marianne: les Visages* 14). Throughout the middle ages, virtues were routinely personified by females in courtly and religious literature, and “in the *Psychomachia* tradition, which dates back to Prudentius’ fifth-century CE text of that name, personified virtues and vices battle for the human soul: in dream visions, the fiction dramatizes the interactions of personifications of emotions and psychological qualities” (Zorach 87). Thus, female allegory has been a clear staple of the European literary tradition. However, in representing France itself, the most prevalent image throughout history was that of the king: “Normalement le souverain régnant prêche à la France son visage ; c’est même la première de ses fonctions, aussi essentielle et triviale à la fois que sont les pièces de monnaie qui le portent” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 24). Naturally the monarchy wished to be thought of synonymously with the nation, cementing the authority of his position, and stamping his identity upon the people he was set to govern.

However, beginning in the sixteenth century, an alternate image besides that of the king also became firmly associated with the French nation. Zorach explains that “a particular association of femininity, nature, and France appears both in visual forms and in the rhetoric that writers (both French and Italian) use in discussing French agricultural production” (85). Likewise in the sixteenth century appeared an iconography which “strongly linked Nature, an Artemis-of-Ephesus-like figure, with France. And the notion of France as not only abundantly providing for itself, but also nourishing foreigners. [...] She is referred to as “GALLA FERTILIS” and depicted surrounded by children to emphasize her aspect as universal mother” (106). From statues to triumphal entries, depictions of France through the sixteenth century and beyond reaffirm this theme of

representation⁷. Agulhon's research concurs with this assessment, though he goes further in describing this allegorical France in physical detail.

Il y avait au moins depuis la Renaissance, à côté de l'effigie du monarque régnant, une tradition plastique de représentation de la Nation française : sculpture, peinture, gravure, monnaie ou médaille. L'allégorie de la France, confondue ou non avec l'ancienne Gaule, était une femme. Elle était naturellement drapée à l'antique, et caractérisée par le port d'une couronne, qui pouvait être la couronne de tours [...] ou bien la couronne royale. [...] Mais il existait une bien intéressante variante, celle qui tirait la France du côté de la force armée. (*Marianne au Pouvoir* 319)

This latter France was often represented in chainmail, a helmet covering her head in the style of Minerva (319). There are therefore two main depictions of France: the peaceful, fertile France closely identified with Nature, and the variations that point towards a more armed, militant France.

The parallel between these two traditional allegorized versions of France and the heroines of the first short stories of *Les Soirées de Médan* is evident. As previously mentioned, the France of Zola is the epitome of a peaceful and productive land, fertile, providing for her *citoyens* as they honestly endeavor, a clear nod to the customary

⁷ “In the sixteenth century as entries began to invoke the classical imagery and rhetoric as well as the order and solemnity of imperial triumph, with arches and an array of personifications [...] The complex and erudite iconography of these entries, as recorded in the books, leans heavily on the image of France as rich maternal body. The association between *actual* women and the peace that leads to national wealth was a strong one in early modern France” (Zorach 105). Personifications at the time of these triumphal entries often included either France or the region represented allegorically by a young woman, or, at times, by the entering queen herself. (105).

representation of France, or *Galla Fertilis*. The interest in this long-established allegorical representation comes from Zola's almost strict adherence to it, followed by a distinct dual rupture: Zola breaks with tradition in showing a France bereft and infertile, and within the story, the deep connection with the land is broken. The stark contrast with the harsh, barren world of *Boule de suif* exemplifies the shift towards a world of man-made commerce and away from Nature. In a slight conciliation with the latter militaristic representation of France, definite elements of *Boule de suif* herself could be considered militant, as she was the only one to have literally taken up "arms" against the Prussian invaders. However, she sits, not as Minerva, but as a revolutionary, ready to fight, as we determine from her impassioned speech to her unmovable companions in the coach. Though spirited, she is an unprotected France rather than a guide for their behavior, as the traditional armed France would be. She is without the culture or upbringing to recognize the traps laid for her by her "friends," without any shield against hypocrisy and any wisdom to hold her ground. She is a helpless France, a pathetic picture rendered more so by its obvious degeneration from past traditions of representation, but also a satirical image, juxtaposing the tradition of the maternal *Galla Fertilis* with an equally generous prostitute, criticizing what French citizens have made of their country, and their consequent hypocritical treatment of her.

These two representations of France (the fertile, peaceful source of plenty and the militant yet noble goddess) held true throughout the ensuing centuries, and having established their existence, we will now consider the intensity of the role of allegorical representation as we approach the time of the Franco-Prussian war. The depictions of the Republic and of France (whose symbiotic relationship will be discussed further on in the

chapter) were reaching a greater audience than ever before, and began to develop a diversity that, in part, prepared the way for the liberties that Zola and Maupassant will proceed to take with her representation. Already in 1848, “l’allégorie féminine était apparemment devenue indispensable ; [...] la monarchie renversée, il fallait inventer la visualisation de l’Etat anonyme” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 98). The importance of a visual interface with the faceless government was therefore manifest by the prevalence of representations, not only of the government, but of the nation as well. This essential role is replayed once again in 1870, when “ l’explosion d’actes et de gestes de républicains libérés de l’Empire retrouve les traditions et les modèles de 1792 ou de 1848” (161). And the explosion of allegory is evident, in every form. During the Commune, one of the goals of the administration was to produce an allegorical statue to replace the column of Vendôme, testifying to its importance in the mentality of the period. Statues allegorizing the Commune itself also appeared, adding to the overwhelming presence of allegory in everyday life:

Dans une telle atmosphère, l’histoire retrouve donc sans surprise, comme en 1848, tout le folklore de la révolution populaire que nous commençons à connaître : l’allégorie transportable, l’allégorie vivante en ses diverses approches, et l’image peinte dessinée : celle-ci, à profusion. Allégories réduites, insérées dans un décor provisoire [...]. On retrouve la tendance à mettre en avant les femmes militantes, surtout si elles sont belles, à les parer et à les exhiber en porte-drapeaux. (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 181)

Living allegories also had a place in celebrations, such as girls dressing up in the Tricolor flag, or as Marianne, as they did for the first official Bastille Day in 1880 (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 159).

Thus it is clear that visually, the French people were more than accustomed to seeing both France in allegorical form and allegories in general. However, the idea of reading them in a fictional account poses interesting questions as to the effects on a typically visual allegory presented instead within a text. Though Agulhon focused his study on sculpture, as he deemed it the most public of art forms, the possible audience for a literary piece is infinitely broader, not being limited spatially or temporally as a physical object must be. The medium of fiction allows for an exploration into the psychology of the allegorical figure, multiplying meanings and complexity, in addition to the dual story they can tell, physically and symbolically. In their literary context, they are allowed to expose so many more facets and thereby generate a multiplicity of connotations and implications of the author, giving them a fuller means of expression than an artist confined within two or three dimensions.

Another implication of this particular use of female allegory within fiction is their educational potential through a realistic portrayal. As far as instructing the public, allegorical women played less of a role than historical figures, as Agulhon states: “On le sait bien pour les édifices nationaux et pour les livres d’histoire, mais c’est encore plus vrai de la statuaire de carrefour : la pédagogie civique et républicaine est passée bien plus souvent par l’exaltation des grands hommes exemplaires que par celle – finalement plus difficile – des abstractions déifiées, Liberté, Révolution ou République” (*Marianne au*

pouvoir 119). He believes that the deification of these ideals thus rendered them less applicable in teaching civic and political duties. The fact that the allegories within these stories are far from “deified” makes them better tools for communicating the lessons of which the public stands in need. Françoise begins as a deity, the image of perfection in a world without fault. However she is thrust into unexpected and difficult situations, proving her humanity and showing the failings of the system that let her down. Boule de suif appears to be the least praiseworthy of all of the characters we meet in Maupassant’s tale, but shines through her tarnished exterior by the end, showing that she is the only one worthy of the elevation a pedestal would afford, and all of those characters who would normally be deemed worthy of artistic representation—the sisters of the church, the aristocrats, the democrat—all are guilty of the worst hypocrisy. The realistic allegories that Zola and Maupassant present the reader are therefore much more useful in the instruction of proper citizen duties than the divine allegories so common at this era. By using the association of a lofty notion with a harsh and realistic portrayal, the authors succeed in teaching the reader the danger of allowing the truly valuable to perish while being obsessively concerned with appearances, a danger to which the Third Republic falls prey.

Allegory as a Fitting Anti-nationalist Tool

Indeed, as the Third Republic gathers steam throughout the 1870s, it becomes clear that the regime is attempting to establish itself through an obsessive dissemination of its image. Though the government took a long time to establish itself after its initial

arrival in power on the 3rd and 4th of September, 1870 (5 years for a constitution, 9 years for a senate) (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 177), it was remarkably decisive when it came to self-promotion. “Dès le 7 septembre 1870, trois jours après sa prise de pouvoir, le gouvernement de la Défense nationale ordonnait de frapper les monnaies en reprenant le type de la République, tel que l’avait conçu Oudiné en 1848 (tête de femme coiffée d’un assortiment d’éléments naturels symboliques, olivier, chêne, blé, etc., et surmontée d’une étoile)” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 25). It is incredible that this was a priority in a state of war. This particular representation by Oudiné was meant to be as apolitical as possible, to represent the entity that created the Republic rather than the political structure itself⁸ and therefore could represent France itself just as easily as the two literary allegories in question. As these stories have an openly proposed anti-nationalist bent, one can see the irony of a nation that cares enough to dedicate money (again, a capitalist concern) to an allegorical representation of France, but cannot recognize the suffering of the actual entity they are representing and claiming to protect. The ironic twist lies in the fact that the superficial nationalism of the regime and her citizen’s love of money led to the betrayal of the lady whose face graces those same coins, as we see in the case of Elisabeth Rousset. Allegory is therefore a perfect mode for satirizing a regime overly concerned with its image, as it goes beyond pictorial representation to show the reality of the situation and the consequence of selfish action.

Also shortly after the Prussian departure, the government instituted an immense program of nationalist monument construction that went into immediate effect.

⁸ “Ces figures ou ces têtes pourront être empruntées à la personnification de la France, du Commerce, de l’Industrie, de l’Agriculture, de la Loi, de la Justice, des Arts, etc, mais ne devront pas avoir de caractère politique” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 202).

S'il fallait une autre preuve du fait que cet avènement a été le véritable point de départ de cette massive et systématique pédagogie nationale, on pourrait la trouver en ceci : non seulement on va faire alors des monuments aux Morts de 1870-1871, mais encore on va se mettre à en faire pour tous les combats d'avant 1870, voire d'avant 1789, qui n'avaient pas encore été honorés, et dont on ira chercher désormais de plus en plus loin dans le passé le souvenir antique, mais tenu pour parent des souvenirs modernes. (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 130)

This desire to propagate nationalist sentiment and glory for any achievement, be it 300 years in the past,⁹ showed a national longing for some success to be proud of, in dire need of heroism. Rather than creating it personally, they dig through the annals of history, searching for anything to prop up the nation, a nation that is generally present, in all supposed glory, upon the monument¹⁰. These two authors fill their stories with anti-monuments, the characters who survive being unworthy of glorifying or commemorating anything. They feel they are presenting the bare truth, without the trappings of nationalism to celebrate non-existent or long-past bravery.

Part of the reason for the preponderant imagery encouraged by the Republic was the nature of the Empire that preceded it. "Nul doute qu'en développant ce précédent

⁹ Among a lengthy list of examples, the city of Saint-Quentin erected a monument in 1881 for the dead of 1870, and 4 years later, one for the battle of 1557, Ibid. 130.

¹⁰ "La sculpture des monuments aux Morts de 1870-1871 nous paraît d'ailleurs conforme aux tendances les plus générales de la *représentation de la France* [...]. La France, solennelle et amplement drapée, quelquefois cuirassée, identifiée par des fleurs de lys, brodées sur la robe ou peintes sur un écu" (*Marianne au Pouvoir* 134).

d'ubiquité municipal, le dernier monarque qu'ait connu la France, ait joué un rôle réel, quoique indirect, dans la diffusion des Mariannes" (Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir* 39). Marianne was essentially the main image the Third Republic sought to link with its own identity¹¹, therefore replacing the image of the emperor who had actively attempted to cover the territory with his own effigy. The extent to which the Republic emulated this practice in their own quest for a strong image "s'accompagnait d'un zèle d'activité et de sentiment capable de rappeler encore, pour quelques décades, le temps où 'la République était belle sous l'Empire'" (186). This link with allegorical representation as their main identity is in full force during the Exposition in 1878, "qui sera celle de la République confirmée et de la réapparition internationale d'une France prudemment ambitieuse. La multiplication des effigies en forme féminine de l'idéal nouveau, à travers la diversité de ses dénominations officielles, est assez frappante" (70).¹² Again, the general obsession with female representation only serves to make Zola and Maupassant's choice all the more logical for an attack on the perceived superficiality of the regime.

The increase in visual allegories occurred simultaneously with a dramatic increase in official "patriotism." As Charles Maurras stated, "there is naturally no France" (qtd. in Tombs 3). "That thing to which one feels a sense of belonging has been created and its characteristics and its boundaries defined (or invented), not only in geographical but also

¹¹ Agulhon explains the implications of adopting Marianne as the flag-bearer of the Republic: "Marianne, c'est la République des quarante-huitards, avec sa complexité et son idéalisme ; avec, tout de même, dans ce nom chaleureux une résonance populaire et socialisante que la République tout court n'a pas nécessairement" (*Marianne au Combat* 165).

¹² The specific statues at this Exposition include three temporary versions of allegorical females: Revolution, the statue on top of l'Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile; the Republic, a statue by Clesinger; Liberty, the giant head of lady Liberty by Bartholdi, which was to eventually be offered to America as a sign of good will between the two countries.

in cultural and often racial terms” (3). Thus, the fledgling Republic sought to establish a strong identity for itself and the nation, and chose to do so through inculcating an intense sense of patriotism through the education of the youth. “Every student in the state’s primary and secondary schools memorized patriotic themes set forth in the *manuels scolaires* [...] Typical of the sacrificial slant of these handbooks of national religion, leading questions were put to France’s youngest citizens: ‘Who are, in your opinion, the greatest martyrs for our *Patrie*?’” (Strenski 58). This critic clearly saw this form of education as indoctrinating, elevating the *Patrie* to the level of deity, and any sacrifice to her as sacrosanct. Furthermore, the patriotic education was essentially geared towards a mental preparation for the inevitable war that would come to recuperate the orphans of 1871: Alsace-Lorraine. “L’école primaire enfin, orgueil de la République, a diffusé à travers l’enseignement [...] de simplismes, d’outrances et de naïvetés que notre époque ne supporte plus guère, une conscience et une fierté nationales qui ont bien eu leur grandeur et leur mérite ; et, qui ont eu aussi leur efficacité politique” (Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir* 318). It was indeed politically expedient that these youth be prepared to fight, as laws were established starting in 1872 that created mandatory military service (154), and they needed to be prepared to love the country they would fight for.

As we saw briefly, the brand of patriotism used on the children in school often incorporated religious overtones and vocabulary, a startling trend for an anti-clerical nation. As Ivan Strenski observes, “patriotic love of the territory of France, for example, exhibits many of the features of traditional religion” (Strenski 81). The propensity towards this particular manifestation of patriotism led one critic to remark, “La guerre franco-prussienne est le moment où s’opère la fusion entre sentiment national et

sentiment religieux. Dorénavant, le patriotisme français pourra compter sur la similitude métaphysique des mythes fondateurs" (Reschef 108). Strenski explains how this blend of religion and nationalism was achieved.

In time, nationalist fervor of the Third Republic dictated that this sought-after "religion de la patrie" would be nothing less than nationalism itself. "After 1870," said Paul Sabatier, "patriotism became the religion of France." The so-called Free Thinkers or "laics" who led this movement doubted that the religious traditions could be retooled to provide the spiritual legitimacy France's coming war with Germany would require. [...] One is not surprised to learn, therefore, that even under the anticlerical Third Republic, the army sought to inculcate "in the heart of their men the great ideas of sacrifice and devotion to the *patrie*." (58)

The emphasis on sacrifice in the nationalist sphere is a particularly interesting blend of religious and patriotic sentiment. In order for the *patrie* to demand true devotion and total sacrifice, it must first be mystified and deified in order to inspire such unquestioning fervor. Classical allegories of the *patrie* were one way of achieving this mystification.

Such extremes in patriotism can only end in disillusionment, as the historian Tison-Braun observed first-hand, seeing this phenomenon play out through the first World War.

L'homme qui dit "La France, c'est les Français" n'est pas un anarchiste qui oppose l'individu à la collectivité. C'est plus grave : il oppose la collectivité concrète des Français à cette France invisible, mystique, qui

exige leur mort comme son dû. On lui a implicitement enseigné que la France était une entité extérieure et supérieure aux Français. Que proclame en effet la psychose de la guerre ? [...] Elle institue un fétichisme de la terre et du drapeau contre lequel toute critique rationnelle est sacrilège. Si l'on objecte que, même pour la France ainsi personnifiée, n'importe quelle paix vaut mieux qu'une telle guerre, la psychose de guerre répond que la Terre et les Morts défendent de jamais céder. A ceux qui plaignent les soldats, elle affirme qu'ils brûlent de se sacrifier, que la mort leur est douce, que d'ailleurs le combat les exalte. Enfin, pour plus de sécurité, la psychose de guerre présente les Allemands comme des monstres, dont la victoire anéantirait toute civilisation. Cette formidable machine de mensonges de fait et d'impostures psychologiques se met en branle dès le premier jour de la guerre comme si elle était prête depuis longtemps. Elle l'était en effet [...] implicite dans le nationalisme que Maurras et Barrès avaient inventé. (44)

This retrospective view of the nationalist trend set in motion in the 1870s is particularly important when taken in the context of Maupassant and Zola's criticism of it. It is crucial that through these stories, though employing allegory to explain the depth of their implications, they use allegory to humanize France, making her part of the people rather than separate from it. The representations of France within these stories do not demand that those around them kneel at the altar and sacrifice all they have. On the contrary, *Boule de suif* sacrifices her own morality, comfort and pride for those around her—at their insistent prompting—only to realize the personal cost was meaningless to them.

Dominique turns himself in to protect the family, a brave sacrifice that in the end is still worthless, the place is burnt, and père Merlier, whose life he was saving in exchange for his own, is dead. Both allegorized characters, along with the general denial to portray war in any sort of glorious manner, show a perspicuity to the dangers of mystifying and promoting war. The nationalist fervor of the nascent Third Republic essentially paved the road for the mentality of sacrifice that led to mass waste of human life during the First World War, and the consequent disenchantment of an entire generation.¹³

This disenchantment was in a way foretold by these authors, warning against the idealized patriotism and the exorbitant sacrifices it entails. As Ivan Strenksi explains, “The idea of sacrifice itself seems precisely one of those religious notions especially prone to migrate into politics [...]; all those examples of patriotic offering of oneself in ‘sacrifice’ for the nation” (9). This was particularly evident at the time *L’attaque du Moulin* and *Boule de suif* were published.

When we reach the height of the nationalist agitation at the end of the nineteenth century, the French literature of “sacrifice” is as rich and elaborated as perhaps any that could be named. Not only that, but so too was French strategic thinking about the conduct of war itself. There, French soldiers were expected to display their devotion to the *patrie* in

¹³ The dangers of the fétichisation of the nation and the religious devotion demanded of French citizens are echoed in the semi-autobiographical writings of Louis Ferdinand Céline (Louis-Ferdinand Destouches) in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. His presents critical views of “la religion drapeautique,” which is only ascribed to by people basically intent on personal gain, as well as the absurdity of the use of doses of “patriotisme” to heal wounded soldiers, showing general disillusionment in the national religion that had sprung up around *la Patrie*.

unleashing the notorious “Gallic fury” in reckless –sacrificial—attacks “to the death” along an often impregnable front. (3)

The prevalence of this theory of sacrifice in the nationalist movement leads us to examine the sacrifices present within the two texts. It is ironic that in the year 1880, the very year where public policy is attempting to commemorate and revive the spirit of the revolution, that the story of *Boule de Suif* appears, revealing the total degradation of all of the morals and principles that the Revolution sought to inspire in its *citoyens*.¹⁴ The characters are unwilling to even sacrifice comfort for the well-being, the dignity, and the sanctity of the nation, let alone sacrificing anything of value (besides their conscience). They are not forced to undergo hardship—truly, the war is merely an inconvenient occurrence that has upset their business ventures just as an early frost or a bad harvest would do. For this, they abandon their nation, literally forcing her to capitulate to the enemy and despising her for it at the same time. She is helpless without friends to defend her, just as the nation France remains dependent upon her citizens to act in behalf of the nation. The irony lies in the importance of sacrifice in the nationalist discourse, which generally demanded “a total annihilating surrender of the self, a complete “giving up” of oneself. Sacrifice served thereby to achieve expiation for sin” (Strenski 4). In the story of *Boule de suif*, only the allegorical nation sacrifices anything—the others are overwhelmingly concerned with appearances and economic concerns, pertinent subjects for the Third Republic.

Rather than being willing to sacrifice anything themselves, the representative characters all see the sacrifice of the individual for the collective as essential, as long as

¹⁴ “If we turn to the French Revolution, we likewise find discourse about sacrifice reminiscent of the Catholic Golden Age” (Strenski 6).

the individual corresponds to someone else. This too, bears a reflection on the contemporary political philosophy of sacrifice¹⁵. “So intense was the new nationalism of the *fin-de-siecle* that it subordinated French individualism to “collectivity” (Strenski 54). The uncaring attitude for the sacrifice of the one for the benefit of the many is blatantly evident in Maupassant. When Elisabeth first refuses to go see the Prussian officer, the count immediately says “Vous avez tort, madame, car votre refus peut amener des difficultés considérables, non seulement pour vous, mais même pour vos compagnons. Il ne faut jamais résister aux gens qui sont les plus forts” (93). His final sentence applied not only to the Prussians, but to her French companions as well, all who thought themselves superior to her, and as such, deserving of her sacrifice. “On en voulait presque à cette fille maintenant, de n’avoir pas été trouver secrètement le Prussien [...] elle aurait pu sauver les apparences en faisant dire à l’officier qu’elle prenait en pitié leur détresse. Pour elle ça avait si peu d’importance!” (107). They are so quick to demand the sacrifice of Elisabeth, counting it as nothing when compared to their own inconvenient sojourn in Tôtes, especially since it was possible for her to “sauver les apparences,” a prime concern of the writers’ contemporary society. The idea that this sacrifice should be an external choice pushed upon the woman under false pretense rather than an internal conclusion is crucial.

¹⁵ After the defeat of 1870, “When the nation was perceived to be at risk from Imperial Germany or its suspected agents such as Dreyfus, we find the military agents of Third Republic, such as Foch, recapitulating Roman Catholic arguments in favor of the sacrificial imperative” (Strenski 57). The example of l’Affaire Dreyfus being one of the quintessential battles of the rights of the individual versus those of the collective, many supported his incarceration despite lack of evidence so that the system might maintain its appearance of justice and strength (57).

For Maupassant, the discourse of sacrifice is truly just a demand of the people, couched in comfortable nationalist rhetoric, to keep their own prosperity and comfort flowing. Because the French readers would be familiar with the rhetoric of sacrifice,¹⁶ *Boule de Suif* becomes even more saintly at the end of the story, for she has totally surrendered herself, expiating not only for her own sins, but for the sins of her uncaring companions. Maupassant drives his point more poignantly through the use of the common notion of sacrifice, paired with the allegorical qualities of the protagonist, representing an entire nation suffering without the least intervention from those who could easily lighten her load and whose sacrifice goes wholly unappreciated, even unnoticed. This is not only a criticism of the general attitude during the war, but again, a warning against the overpowering nature of a demanding majority, particularly a majority that uses the concepts of duty, personal glory, and religious justification (all representative of the nationalism of the Third Republic and of arguments presented to convince Elisabeth to give in to the Prussian officer,) as a means of obtaining the desired results.¹⁷ As sacrifice was such a natural extension of the French nationalist trend, Maupassant's abused allegorical woman stands as a perfect anti-nationalist figure, criticizing the hypocritical manipulation of these notions of sacrifice.

¹⁶ "Given that France is one of the principal points of origin for Western notions of citizenship, civic duty, nationalism, and the like, France also becomes a major source of examples for the working out of relations between self-interest and sacrifice. Whether in the course of the ordinary duties of citizenship or in the extraordinary demands made in wartime, France has been the venue for some of the classic contests between devotion to individual rights and dignity over against the imperatives of life within communities. The French Revolution's rhetoric of sacrifice for the "nation" has perhaps set the standard for calls to patriotic sacrifice ever since" (Strenski 2).

¹⁷ In a parallel interpretation of this text, A. Boureau explains this sacrifice in terms of the cannibalistic sacrifice that was imposed on Paris, crushing the Commune in order to bring the Republic into existence. Jean-Marie Privat also refers to sacrifice in an analysis of *Boule de suif*, but from the perspective of an indifferent society that routinely tramples the "other" in order to meet its needs.

The role of female allegory in this nationalist doctrine of fidelity and sacrifice is evident through the necessary glorification of the *patrie*, allegorical representation being an easy, visible and traditional way to achieve the spiritual elevation necessary to inspire devotion. The use of female imagery in nationalist campaigns was not an innovation of the Third Republic. Already in the sixteenth century “the productive female body [...] appeared in a wide variety of contexts, many of them specifically nationalist. With the Church split by doctrinal struggles, the nation might take on the Church’s role of symbolic family, enabling France “herself” to serve as the object of universal fidelity” (Zorach 85). The church being caught in a similarly difficult situation at the end of the nineteenth century, watching the nation undergo a gradual shift towards secularism, it is only logical that the nation should likewise serve a unifying function. In an even more startling similarity between the approach of the Third Republic and pre-Revolution France, “As early as the fifteenth century, a female personification of France existed in both text and image: several beautifully illuminated fifteenth-century manuscripts of Alain Chartier’s *Le quadriloge invectif* present “France,” who exhorts the French to serve their nation, as a woman in a crown and royal robes. In Chartier’s poem, France asks men to devote themselves to their country of birth” (86). This long heritage of associating female allegory with nationalist devotion lends a distinct satirical edge to the anti-nationalist approach of our authors through allegory, and adds a deeper layer to the obvious ironies of both texts, as both representations of the nation suffer at the hands of the ones that have traditionally worshipped them.

Representing France as an allegorical figure is a long and widespread tradition. Though allegory exhibits many inherent strengths as a rhetorical mode, the use of female

allegory in particular marshals an entire regiment of implications, connotations, and historical contextualization. The rich history of allegorical associations with France enriches its usage in the short stories by Zola and Maupassant, creating polyphonic protagonists that speak on a multiplicity of levels to the French reader. Moreover, the important role of allegory in both the Republic and the nationalist zeal that Zola and Maupassant so despised made it the perfect tool for the ironic criticism they were to create. By bringing an allegorized nation into the realm of humanity, they defy the trend towards the nationalist rhetoric that deifies the nation, creating a national religion through which any political expedient can be justified. The dangers of inculcating such blind devotion to glorified ideals of war and nation are already apparent, revealed in allegorical clarity within the pages of *Les Soirées de Médan*.

Contemporary Allegory and its Reflections within *Les Soirées de Médan*

The year 1880 belonged to a period of intense nationalism which, as Maupassant at the time and critics more recently have both stated, often relied on exaggerated and propaganda-riddled tales of French glory. In conjunction with these written glorifications of the nation, the allegorical production of the time was also infected by this spirit of overbearing national pride. Exploring the history and role of the female allegorical representation of France has established a convention for allegory in the French mentality, and through comparing Maupassant and Zola's use of allegory to the traditional role, the satirical implications of allegorizing their realistic tales have emerged. Furthermore, by delving deeper into the nature of this nationalism in the preceding chapter, we have discovered a distinct link between the idealization of France and the presence of allegory. As we continue to examine the manifestations of this nationalism, it becomes evident that this satirical relationship held true not only in representations of France, but extended to a multiplicity of other contemporary allegorical representations. In this chapter, we will focus on two ubiquitous contemporary female allegories as they relate to Françoise and Elisabeth: Marianne and Joan of Arc. The relationship of the allegorical representations within these stories to the other allegorical representations of the day will elucidate another facet of the project of antinationalism within *Les Soirées de Médan*: in their distinct similarities and clear differences, we see precisely how the authors' use of allegory becomes a satirical

commentary on the individual complacency particular to the nationalism surrounding them.

Marianne

We will begin examining the role of contemporary allegory with the most prevalent of all French female allegorical figures: Marianne. Her origins are to be found in the French Revolution, when “Le nom est attesté comme sobriquet de dérision pour la République. [...] Marie-Anne était un prénom banal, répandu, donc populaire, donc voué à désigner le régime qui se voulait tel” (Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 18). From this time forward, her image and name were linked with Revolution, with Liberty and with the State, all to varying degrees (8). As Agulhon explains, “elle est omniprésente parce qu’elle est polysémique” (*Marianne au pouvoir* 344), allowing her to represent an entire regiment of political and social agendas. The fluidity of the allegorical significance of Marianne’s image was in evidence from its very inception. “La pièce maîtresse du système républicain de valeurs politiques étant évidemment la Liberté, la première Révolution avait quelque peu confondu ou mêlé les deux, avait – sans trop se poser le problème – tendu à donner à la République l’image de la Liberté avec son attribut essentiel, le bonnet phrygien” (Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 105). This last emblem, the Phrygian cap, is one that follows this allegory through essentially all of her transformations, though the exceptions to this rule will prove to be a compelling support for the awareness of Zola and Maupassant of the prevalent female allegory, its mutations, and their pertinent criticism of the political implications that such variations entailed.

The history of the reception of this figure is as varied as the reaction to the various political parties and movements that adopted her as their totem. “De la déférence à la familiarité railleuse, de la vénération à la haine, elle a suscité toute une gamme de sentiments ; nouvelle sainte ou nouvelle déesse pour les uns, Marianne est “la gueuse” pour d’autres ; la France elle-même est princesse ou marâtre” (Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 9). The extremes in reaction to Marianne show the importance of the representational role she plays: surely she must be closely linked to these ideas she purportedly embodies, or her image would not provoke such intense emotions or responses. The extremes to which these responses extend, from “déesse” to “gueuse,” will become an important detail in our examination of the relationship of this figure with the allegories contained within the Médan stories.

Before comparing Marianne and the textual allegories of *Les Soirées de Médan*, we will first establish the habitual allegorical melding of Marianne and France, thus strengthening the relationship between Françoise and Elisabeth, who both represent France, and Marianne. First and foremost, “le caractère interchangeable des allégories est dans les habitudes du temps” (Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir* 229). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, there were conventions for representing France as a woman,¹⁸ while the conventions for representing Marianne were at least as codified. One

¹⁸ “Il y avait au moins depuis la Renaissance, à côté de l’effigie du monarque régnant, une tradition plastique de représentation de la Nation française : sculpture, peinture, gravure, monnaie ou médaille. L’allégorie de la France, confondue ou non avec l’ancienne Gaule, était une femme. Elle était naturellement drapée à l’antique, et caractérisée par le port d’une couronne, qui pouvait être la couronne de tours [...] ou bien la couronne royale. [...] Mais il existait une bien intéressante variante, celle qui tirait la France du côté de la force armée” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 319). Zorach also heavily emphasized the maternal qualities of France, examining iconography that “linked Nature, an Artemis-of-Ephesus-like figure, with France. And the notion of France as not only abundantly providing for itself, but also nourishing foreigners. [...] She is referred to as “GALLA FERTILIS” and depicted surrounded by children to emphasize her aspect as universal mother” (106).

of the earliest descriptions appeared in a 1789 article entitled “Liberté,” stating that she was “une jeune femme, vêtue de blanc, tenant d’une main un sceptre et de l’autre un bonnet, le sceptre exprime l’empire que par elle l’homme a sur lui-même. Quant au bonnet qu’on lui voit dans l’autre main, c’était le signe de l’affranchissement chez les Romains” (qtd. in Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 22). These elements characterized Marianne throughout the nineteenth century, with small variations, of course, symbols that are nowhere to be found in the traditional representations of France herself.

However, as we approach the time of the establishment of the Third Republic, a shift occurs that enables a more concrete fusion of these two allegories. The explanation of the artistic implications of the new political entity in power is explained by Agulhon:

La République française qui s’installe dans l’Etat et qui, parce qu’elle est d’essence démocratique, prétend représenter la Nation, comment distinguerait-elle bien son image comme régime de son image comme patrie ? En somme, la République française [est] ainsi établie entre l’allégorie de la Révolution populaire et l’allégorie de la France tout court.
(*Marianne au combat* 240)

The very nature of the new government promoted its equation with the Nation and its people, as a democratic government naturally attests.¹⁹ “L’expression ‘la République’

¹⁹ “Cette identification tendancielle de la République à la Patrie. C’est d’abord la tendance naturelle d’un régime au pouvoir, parce qu’il est le pouvoir, à assumer et exalter l’intérêt national qu’il a pris en charge ; puis, la tradition particulière issue de la Révolution française, et qui fait de la France “la Grande Nation,” celle dont l’identité nationale serait une mission idéologique, celle dont la force, et même l’expansion de la force, contribueraient au progrès universel des lumières et des libertés ; et enfin, la circonstance de 1870 qui a voué les républicains à assumer, avec l’éclat que l’on sait, la

étant désormais de plus en plus souvent utilisée pour dire ‘la France’ par périphrase, pourquoi l’image n’aurait-elle pas aussi connu le même sort ? ” (*Marianne au pouvoir* 319). The proactive nature of this synonym-seeking regime and the manipulation of its imagery to reflect this affiliation are apparent in several specific ways.

Essentially, the way that both Zola and Maupassant chose to represent their heroines was directly relevant to the Third Republic and its self-representation through female allegory. The writing of these stories coincides directly with the expansion of the image of Marianne. By 1880, it was a common thing for supporters to have a replica of "the Republic" in their home, and it was becoming tradition for Parisians to keep them in their house and display them in the windows for the nationalist parades, including those on July 14th (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 166). This form of allegory, along with the Republic, was becoming a part of everyday life, "les bons républicains vivaient donc volontiers en présence de ‘Marianne’, en diffusaient l’effigie, en sorte que de proche en proche, l’ensemble des Français avaient de plus en plus d’occasions de la rencontrer. La République, avons-nous dit, ‘entraîné dans les moeurs’ (170). However, this widespread appearance of the Republic’s image brought with it the concern that the supposed melding of the Nation and the Republic was in fact a threat to the representation of France itself. “Comment dès lors cette femme nouvelle, allégorie de la République comme régime et comme pouvoir, n’éclipserait-elle pas, mieux, n’absorberait-elle pas en elle, la Représentation de la France-patrie ?” (*Marianne au Pouvoir* 139). Yet another pertinent concern expressed within the Médan texts, the will to promote nationalist

Défense nationale, et à faire de la réparation de la défaite une sorte d’affaire d’honneur pour la République” (Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir* 318).

interests endangered remembering of the nation itself. As discussed in the first chapter, the state of abandonment of both female protagonists in the final moments of their stories specifically by those purporting to protect the nation, bears a direct reflection on this socio-political phenomenon.

The importance of protecting the visual representation of Marianne is definitely apparent in 1879 during a municipal council in Paris concerned that her appearance remain unscathed. Viollet-le-Duc spoke concerning the importance of the attributes of the statue that was to be erected in the Place du Château-d'Eau:

Il est évident que, pour le public, la personnification de la République existe ; elle n'est pas à créer. En chercher une nouvelle, c'est vouloir refaire *la Marseillaise*, c'est-à-dire trouver l'impossible ; car il est dans la vie des peuples, au moment des grandes crises, de ces éclosions qui passent à l'état de mythes que rien ne saurait effacer, remplacer ou faire oublier." (qtd. in *Marianne au Pouvoir* 106)

Such a statement becomes more interesting given the intense debate surrounding the representation of Marianne beginning directly following the Franco-Prussian war. At its inception, the imagery generally supported by the Third Republic was that of the traditional goddess, proudly bearing the Phrygian cap. "La République gouverne la France, assume le rôle national, et du coup, insensiblement, impose à la France son principal signe distinctif. Initialement politique, le bonnet phrygien va tendre à devenir commun" (136). In several instances, in the beginning of the 1870s, female statues

representing France display this symbol²⁰ that has been associated with Marianne from her first revolutionary appearance, however, within a few short years, the political agenda in merging these two figures shifted dramatically.

The Phrygian cap was originally worn by the emancipated slaves of Rome, and became the “red cap of liberty” during the French Revolution (“Phrygian”) and the subsequent revolutions during the following century. However, its presence soon became the target of direct animosity from official channels, and in 1873 many prefectures demanded the removal of the ‘bustes aux attributs surmontés d’un bonnet phrygien,’ from all of the Hôtels de ville” (Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 194). This was only one manifestation of the intense debate surrounding this cap that was suddenly deemed “subversive,” an object “de la répulsion officielle” (197). A statue that was erected in 1873 in a direct effort to unite the images of France and the Republic in a public monument, was actually dismantled three years later by the army for its revolutionary appearance, as she was wearing the “bonnet phrygien” as well as the municipal crown (200). The intensity of the reactions to this symbol only increased throughout this decade, so that in 1880, during the first official celebration of the storming of the Bastille, police forcibly removed a “bonnet phrygien” that someone had hung on their tricolor flag (223). The ultimate irony of the removal of a symbol for its revolutionary significance during the celebration of the essential revolutionary act of 1789, the very revolution to which the

²⁰ Les “France” d’après 1870 présentent une assez grande variété de signes distinctifs, d’abord parce que l’Ancien Régime en avait légué déjà deux principaux, ensuite parce que les artistes s’émancipaient de plus en plus aisément de l’empire des conventions iconologiques. De là des possibilités de choix, au nombre desquelles la contamination républicaine ne pouvait manquer d’apparaître” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 135).

cap is ultimately attached, shows the obsessive control and preoccupation with symbolic appearances that characterize the Third Republic. Agulhon explains the preferred method of representing the new France/Republican imagery:

Les gouvernants de 1880, ne voulant ou ne pouvant résister à l'élan républicain qui portait avec lui l'image féminine, avaient eu du moins le souci de la neutraliser, en la privant du bonnet phrygien. La prudence iconologique de la République opportuniste, vers 1880, c'était à la fois la banalité puritaine de l'écusson RF, et, quand il fallait une femme allégorique, la coiffure à couronne d'épis. (*Marianne au Pouvoir* 109)

This tendency towards a more organic, stable allegory is a sign of prudence: by appearing less revolutionary, the Republic can maintain stability, a status quo that would be threatened by a more militant or active representation. On August 9, 1875, in announcing an artists' contest for the official stamp to represent the new Republic, and update the image of Marianne, the rules stated, in the *Journal officiel*: "Ces figures ou ces têtes pourront être empruntées à la personnification de la France, du Commerce, de l'Industrie, de l'Agriculture, de la Loi, de la Justice, des Arts, etc, mais ne devront pas avoir de caractère politique" (qtd. in Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 202).

The trend of representing both the Republic and France with things of nature and agricultural production represents a direct link towards the maternal representation of France as a symbolic source of plenty and abundance that harkens back to the Renaissance. This helped the liberal republicans who were dominating the Republic to maintain a solid and established image, not only equating France with the institution

through which they were governing, but a productive, antiquated, and idealized France with the current Republic. Robert Tombs explains why this was necessary:

Specific to France in the 1880s was its political flux: the country seemed to be ‘up for grabs’ as old-style royalism was moribund, but the new republic itself seemed to be running on the rocks, with liberal ‘opportunist’ republicanism attempting to monopolize power and yet proving unable to meet society’s needs. Hence, liberal values themselves were exposed to attack in France because of their political predominance.

(Tombs xiii)

The necessity of consolidating the liberal position was therefore manifest in the iconography with which they chose to represent themselves, removing traces of the radical past and presenting a façade of tradition, inheriting the position of authority with the imagery associated with it.

The prevalence of this organic trend and the intensity of the opposition to the revolutionary depiction of the Republic coincide specifically with the appearance of *Les Soirées de Médan*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Françoise appears as the epitome of the classical portrayal of France in Zola’s story, closely related and connected to nature, idealized and elevated for the promise of her fertility. Her allegorical role as France thus becomes critical given the political situation: the Republic wishes to align its own imagery with that of the French nation, and therefore relies on a traditional portrayal in order to establish its position. Zola closely mirrors this idea through his creation of Françoise, but through his idealized landscape separates this landscape, and the girl who

embodies it, from reality, drawing the readers' attention to the fictional nature of the account. Though this image is beautiful and at the same time comforting for the nostalgic mind, this France never existed except as a dream, and to return to it is impossible. The overwhelming evidence that the Republic is actively manipulating its allegorical nature in an attempt to tap into the nostalgic and comforting imagery of this natural France leads to the conclusion that Zola can only be criticizing their brand of easily-swallowed, easily followed nationalism in adopting Françoise as an official figurehead for the regime. The use of traditional imagery, accompanied by traditional rhetoric and a focus on the glories of the past emphasizes the regime's tendency to look towards the past, living on borrowed glory rather than forging ahead and dealing with the changes of the current state. Through his heroine, Zola reveals the outdated and wishful nature of such a ploy, one that denies the current state of the nation and its citizens.

Furthermore, there was a concurrent move linking this broad allegory of the Nation/Marianne with the imagery of light, another example of softening the image of a harsher Republic which the regime feared would alienate or offend, thereby weakening their position. Architect Hector Horeau proposed a mammoth project in 1868, to "grouper au Trocadéro les six ministères, en les reliant par des portes à galeries, de manière à former un vaste hémicycle autour d'une statue de la France intelligente, statue colossale éclairant le Monde représenté par un globe"(qtd in Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 167). This heliocentric model of France incorporates the idea of light that has been associated intermittently with both the nation and the Republic since the original Revolution. The favoritism for this model was shown through the incredible propagation of busts of

Marianne on public buildings throughout France, clear preference being shown towards this softened model by the official stamp of approval of 1878:

Et surtout le gouvernement fait choix pour les bâtiments publics du buste créé par Doriot, où la République, à visage calme et grave, cuirassée et drapée, porte une couronne végétale ; seulement, sur le front, formant diadème, deux épis de blé avançant de part et d'autre encadrent une étoile à cinq branches. Ainsi une fois de plus, le thème végétal et le thème lumière (ici l'étoile, comme ailleurs le soleil) se conjuguent pour substituer leur leçon de nature et de sérénité à la leçon volontariste du bonnet rouge. (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 106)

Thus, the association with nature and light was the main focus of the allegorical females that were to become the visual and personal interface of the French people with their government. The obvious classical, unemotional quality of this imagery, the link to past representations of a France of the *Ancien Régime* as well as portrayals of Ceres reveal a regime that is carefully depoliticizing its image as well as diminishing the active role of the common citizen, allowing nature to replace reform, apathy to replace moral indignation.

One of the most important examples of this “enlightened” allegorical female that the Republic wished to disseminate is that of the Statue of Liberty. Bartholdi’s statue, originally entitled “La Liberté éclairant le monde,” was “définitivement conçue dans les années 1870, réalisée au début des années 1880, la Liberté ensoleillée est *exactement contemporaine* du moment de l’histoire politico-symbolique de la France, où le bonnet

phrygien a été un objet de conflit” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 106). Though Liberty itself has a separate iconographic history (though still steeped in female allegory), the desire of the Republic to spread this classical image of light and nature to the world, while simultaneously aligning itself with this ideology of divine light and classical heritage, could not be more clear than the French Republic’s gift to the United States in 1886 and the central presence of temporary versions of this sculpture at expositions in France throughout this decade.

This widespread revival of the allegorical female figure with a crown of light, and her general association with the idea of light is certainly addressed in the female allegories of *Les Soirées de Médan*. Zola spends nearly an entire chapter of a short story describing the play of light and shadow through the forests of Rocreuse, detailing the soft lighting that imbues the French countryside. The land itself seems to shine. In an incredibly direct reference during the description of Françoise, her face is encircled about by a “couronne de soleil” (Zola 18), an allusion to the omnipresent version of female allegory endorsed by the Third Republic. However, this whole prelude to the story, as mentioned before, does nothing but emphasize the impossibility of such a place, and its definitive departure by the end of the tale. No action or progress is made during this phase of the story— it is more of a static picture of an idyllic landscape than a realistic portrayal, just as the Third Republic’s image is no more than a static, wishful portrayal.

Given the origin of such a tale—a self-described realist author participating in a project to portray the realities of the war—the creation of such an idealized landscape and heroine invite closer analysis to ascertain why such descriptions would be included in the realist narrative. The historical context provides an answer: the prevalence of the light-

infused allegorical Republic that leans so heavily on tradition is echoed so closely throughout this tale that such mirroring could only be ironic. Once reality hits this idealized hamlet and Françoise experiences the realities of war, she is described as “imbécile” (63). She does not move, she does not act in the final scenes: she has become a frozen statue, but one “accroupie [...] entre les cadavres de son mari et de son père” (63). Essentially, Zola is criticizing the inability of this popular image to cope with reality and to provide citizens with any kind of realistic or useful model. This idealization is a dangerous illusion, one that will be dashed with the first dose of reality, one that would come during the achievement of the Third Republic’s main agenda: war with Germany.

Above each of Doriot’s allegorical busts were the words “Honneur et Patrie” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 212), a fact which further solidifies this reading: these two words summarize all of the characters’ motives in *L’attaque du Moulin*, however, these were shown to be ineffectual though well-intentioned, nostalgic but nonexistent within the French army. These principles are again elevated within a supposedly realistic narrative, but only to show how they no longer operate in the modern world, a world which we see more clearly throughout *Boule de suif*. The light here is either absent or harsh and unwelcome, the implication through these stories being that the present representations of France are euphemistic and outdated. Boule de Suif does not radiate light, and the dull landscape surrounding her echoes this. She does not follow the calm classical model, but rather embodies the active Marianne, the revolutionary “bonnet phrygien” that has fallen into disgrace with the Republic. Less cultured and more reactionary, she attempts to act for herself, an unpopular concept with a people more content to look back to a more peaceful time of heroes and bravery that never existed. It

is as though Maupassant reminds the reader that the true benefactors of the nation were those willing to fight and risk themselves for the *Patrie*, a sacrifice that both the regime and the citizens are willing to forget, manifest in the removal of the subversive cap from all allegorical representations of the time, and symbolically in the silence and disgrace that greets an astonished Elisabeth.

This idealized image of Marianne/the Nation was not universally accepted, however. To summarize the place of Marianne in 1880, “A cette date Marianne est vraiment dans le langage, mais que la connotation d’hostilité méprisante (langage de la droite) attire davantage l’attention que la connotation d’idolâtrie naïve (langage de l’extrême gauche). C’est la première en tout cas que retient la lexicographie” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 226). Those who despised Marianne were not few in number, though their reasons are easily classified under two separate motivations: those who had problems with the image of Marianne herself, and those who harbored scorn for the regime she represented.

In considering the image itself, the iconographic adulation that accompanied the imagery of Marianne made many uncomfortable, exacerbated by the ubiquity of her icon.

C’est dans le Midi surtout que les emblèmes sont pernicieux. La République y a pris figure de déesse ; son buste est religieusement montré, dans les mairies, aux jours de fête. Ce sont les Mariannes chères aux rouges. Les nouvelles saintes, disent-ils. Déesse, disions-nous tout à l’heure. Déesse ou sainte, pour le peuple méridional, c’est tout un. (qtd. in Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* 189)

The equivocation of political figurehead with divinity, “l’idole d’un néo-paganisme militant” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 324) could not help but alienate the adherents of organized religion, especially given the proximity of the name “Marianne” with “Marie,” one of the central figures of worship in France at this time. She could therefore be set up in opposition to organized religion, as Zola himself did in his 1898 work *Fécondité*, creating a character named Marianne who is elevated to divinity through her fertility and consequent posterity, for which her husband worships her in a manner “plus haut et plus vrai que le culte de la Vierge, le culte de la mère, la mère aimée et glorifiée” (Zola, qtd. in Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 183). This more overt appeal to allegory lends greater credence to Zola’s past use of the rhetorical mode in *L’attaque du moulin*, as well as providing an example of the anticlerical nature of Marianne. Marianne here is the “déesse d’une religion panthéiste de la Nature et de la Vie, très clairement opposée à la religion stérile du catholicisme” (183). This anticlerical nature is also evident in Maupassant, when the “bonnes soeurs” play a central role in persuading Boule de suif to capitulate, manipulating theological doctrine to suit their immediate desires. The role of female allegory may thus play an inherently anti-religious role, however, the Republic’s use of Marianne ironically supported a creation that elicited an equally religious response. Thus, an anti-clerical organization essentially created a nationalist religion, whose object of veneration, Marianne, was portrayed satirically in the two allegorical tales, in both cases showing their misplaced adulation of an ideal.

Those that objected to Marianne’s political history and role overwhelmingly gravitated towards the insult of prostitute. This tendency was not new, prostitution being a long-standing degradation of the female condition in general, and more specifically of

female allegory. Given the male-dominated condition of society during the late eighteenth century, often this insult towards the female image served to “dénoncer l’image comme indigne ou comme traîtresse à son idéal officiel. La personnalité féminine de la République d’abord n’est pas toujours à son avantage, nous l’avons bien vu en survolant la caricature, il y a les femmes laides et les femmes méchantes” (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 303). The tradition of representing Marianne specifically as a prostitute had been in place since the beginning of the century, and had become a codified mark of anti-republicanism.

L’insulte à l’égard d’un être féminin est en effet particulièrement cinglante, et se marque aisément de connotations sexuelles. Que les hommes au pouvoir soient débonnaires et laxistes, la République qui les résume métaphoriquement sera une femme facile ; que ces hommes soient vénaux, la République sera une prostituée. “Gueuse” est resté le terme le plus banal. (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 324)

Even Paul Verlaine asserted this sentiment in a sonnet entitled *Buste pour Mairies* in 1881:

[...] Juvénal y perdrait son latin, Saint-Lazare
Son appareil sans pair et son personnel rare,
A guérir l’hystérique égorgeuse des Rois.

Elle a tout, rogne, teigne... et le reste et la gale !

Qu'on la pendre pour voir un peu dinguer en croix

Sa vie horizontale et sa mort verticale !

Not only does he mention the hysterical nature of Marianne, dwelling on a disease that is female-specific and was to blame for the incomprehensible, illogical nature of females throughout the eighteenth century, the final blow is “sa vie horizontale,” clearly indicating a life of prostitution and corrupt morals. La Gueuse, a comprehensive term that implies poverty as well as prostitution, was therefore a common appellation of the Marianne, and in turn, of the Republic. As the Republic wished to be synonymous with the *Patrie*, there is a distinct relationship between “la Gueuse” and the French Nation in 1880.

Maupassant's decision to represent France as a prostitute therefore follows an established pattern, as does his allegorizing of the character. In choosing Boule de suif as the protagonist for this short story, he effectively nods to the traditional treatment of the Republic. In a fascinating diatribe, Mme Loiseau expresses her scorn for Elisabeth, muttering, “Puisque c'est son métier, à cette gueuse, de faire ça avec tous les hommes, je trouve qu'elle n'a pas le droit de refuser l'un plutôt que l'autre [...] Moi, je trouve qu'il se conduit très bien, cet officier. Il est peut-être privé depuis longtemps; et nous étions là trois qu'il aurait sans doute préférées. Mais non, il se contente de celle à tout le monde” (110). She refers to Elisabeth as “la gueuse,” using the most common term directed towards Marianne, and actually insults her in favor of the Prussian, showing the complete lack of respect for “celle à tout le monde.” Not only is Elisabeth a prostitute, but her

dominant physical trait is her corpulence. In 1848, one historian noted a provincial tendency to frame insults around physical size as well. “La tribune était placée à la hauteur et dans l’axe du boulevard Chave sous le colosse en plâtre de la Liberté, que nos *barbabous* [gens du peuple des quartiers de pêcheurs, traditionnellement dévots et traditionalistes] appelaient assez irrévérencieusement “*la grosse Marianne*” (qtd in Agulhon, *Marianne au Combat* 106). Grotesque statues of obese, vulgar Mariannes were also made throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century (Agulhon, *Marianne au Pouvoir* 327). The direct reflection of the conventional anti-republican imagery in his character shows Maupassant’s awareness, once again, of the current roles and issues of female allegory. However, the great departure from the common usage of “la Gueuse” and other terms, comes in the author’s specific treatment of prostitution.

Maupassant does not portray Boule de suif as a prostitute to abase her, rather to show the hypocrisy of those who supposedly have superior and irreproachable morals, “des honnêtes gens autorisés qui ont de la Religion et des Principes” (78). The word “autorisé” plays an important role in this passage, indicating the official importance of appearances and status, another jab in a continuous stream of revelations of hypocrisy within the social system as pointed out by Maupassant. By casting his version of “France” in a socially reprehensible role, especially given the historical context of the allegorical prostitute, he plays with the readers’ bias and expectations.

Or la laideur, comme la beauté, est lourde de traits moraux qui s’expriment à nos yeux par son biais. Nous lisons dans les beaux visages de Michel-Ange, parce que nous voulons bien les y lire, parce que toute notre éducation nous porte à les y trouver, humanité, bonté, grâce, piété, extase, et sa main de maître peut rendre

belle la souffrance et sublime la difformité. Mais dans la laideur, nous lisons bestialité, bassesse, et accumulation de tous les défauts. (Reschef 14)

Reschef explains that a reader impulsively desires to attribute good characteristics to those that are physically appealing, an impulse that is continually misleading throughout this text. The connection of Boule de suif's social status with her physical appeal does not allow positive connotations to ring true: she is the perversion of positive qualities presented in *démessure*. Maupassant uses our "visual education" in order to play on stereotypes and criticize the hypocrisy of those that ascribe to them so firmly. The questionable morals of a prostitute, a profession clearly associated with "laideur" and "bassesse," prove to be stronger and more durable than the morals of the rest of her company combined, including nobility, bourgeois, nuns and democrats. By establishing his allegorical female as a prostitute, Maupassant points out the hypocrisy of decrying corruption in one's neighbor without bothering to verify one's own moral stance. The common practice of qualifying the Republic as a prostitute because of corruption within the political system is therefore echoed in Maupassant, but with a caution: as an allegorical representation of France, Boule de suif's profession shows that the corruption has spread beyond the institution, making the insult hypocritical and supercilious in addition to its well-founded aspects. Boule de suif is in fact a prostitute, yet all of the passengers incite her to an immoral act for which they then deny any responsibility. Maupassant explains that though corruption of the Republic, and France itself, may exist, the citizens of France must first improve themselves morally before they can expect a similar cleansing of the government.

The role and development of Marianne, and her correlation to specific details of both allegorical females contained within the stories of Zola and Maupassant, strengthen the argument that they were both aware and critical of the contemporary allegorical manifestations of the Third Republic. The direct reflection of the visual and social trends within the literary representations proves that the allegorical similarities were in fact part of the message transmitted by these two authors, as the readers and critics of the time would have been familiar with the popular images of Marianne and the meanings of their usage within these texts. A further example of this current awareness and application within the texts lies in the comparison between Françoise, Elisabeth and another powerful female figure who took on allegorical qualities throughout the nineteenth century: the popular and patriotic Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc

As nationalist intensity built throughout the 1870s, the image of Joan of Arc gained increasing popularity, becoming a common vehicle for ideologies and a model of patriotism. In 1869, Bishop Dupanloup pushed for her canonization, saying that “nothing would be more popular in France, and elsewhere, and at the same time this act would be very opportune under the present circumstances” (qtd. in Krumeich 70). During the 1880s “various abortive attempts were made to establish festivals and republican commemoration days in honor of Joan, daughter of the people,” including a national holiday in her honor, and in later years, a move to replace the *Marseillaise* with a national anthem entitled *Hymne à l’Etendard de Jeanne d’Arc* (70). Though she served a general

patriotic purpose, her image was also adopted by specific groups due to the correspondence of her historical role with their political agenda. “Modern politicians and artists both literary and cinematic have been so quick to adopt her as the symbolic vehicle for their own visions” (Wood ix)²¹. The nature of the story of Joan, her intensity and single-minded devotedness to a cause made her an adaptable allegory, capable of embodying various ideological agendas.

As the nationalist Maurice Barrès said, “[Joan of Arc] was a discovery of democracy, of the people speaking out” (qtd. in Krumeich 63). As such she proved to be the perfect totem for both the democratic Republic and the monarchist crowd. “She had been celebrated uninterruptedly at Orléans since the fifteenth century, and the historians of the absolute monarchy cherished and transmitted her memory as one sent by God to aid the king” (66). This monarchist angle of the history was in fact the central theme of the story of Joan until the mid-nineteenth century. “Until her resurgence of popularity in the 19th century, and a rediscovery of writings proving her nationalistic intentions, historians were generally “convinced that Joan’s ‘commission’ ended with the coronation, and that going on with the struggle to drive away the English was tempting providence” (66). Previous to these discoveries, her role was seen as a female figure overstepping her bounds and suffering the consequences rather than a firm supporter of nationalism.

²¹ The popularity of Joan’s image in visual arts and literature carried over with the advent of film, already taking appearing in cinematic form by 1897. The popularity of Joan of Arc as a subject is explained by the continual trend of nationalism, the numerous films dealing with her life often referring directly to a modern call to arms against the German threat, inspiring 6 more French films during the following 20 years (Harty 242).

This new nationalist theme was at the heart of the immense library of literature produced surrounding Joan at this time. A bishop of Orléans in 1850 showed the beginnings of this trend when he stated “The ungrateful king and the clerics of the time (unlike the official church) might indeed have caused her death; but her ‘mission’ was not over—she should still be the guide of an eternal France” (qtd. in Krumeich 68). Jules Michelet’s definitive work on Joan in 1841 was perhaps most responsible for this transformation, as he portrayed her as the ultimate source of the French *Patrie*. In his introduction to her biography, this philosopher explains the true importance of Joan’s role in French history:

Or, le pauvre des pauvres, la plus misérable personne et la plus digne de pitié, en ce moment, c’était la France. [...] Pour la première fois, on le sent, la France est aimée comme une personne. Et elle devient telle, du jour qu’elle est aimée. C’était jusque-là une réunion de provinces, un vaste chaos de fiefs, grand pays, d’idée vague. Mais, dès ce jour, par la force du cœur, elle est une Patrie. [...] Tout le peuple oublie son péril ; cette ravissante image de la Patrie, vue pour la première fois, le saisit et l’entraîne ; il sort hardiment hors des murs, il déploie son drapeau, il passe sous les yeux des Anglais qui n’osent sortir de leurs bastilles. Souvenons-nous toujours, Français, que la Patrie chez nous est née du cœur d’une femme, de sa tendresse et de ses larmes, du sang qu’elle a donné pour nous. (*Jeanne d’Arc* 41)

Joan is thus portrayed in a mythical maternal role: she brought into existence the spirit of a nation through her personal trials and travails, while Michelet unifies through his final

phrase the idea of both Christian redemption and maternal sacrifice. This national identity that has been created—this *Patrie*—is defined in female terms, as a person, as “ravissante,” and finally, through the sacrifice of one so pure, as one redeemed and sanctified. In his conclusion, Michelet directly states that France was saved by a woman and “La France était femme elle-même” (151). This allegorized and holy *Patrie* inspires the weak French people to greater heights, pushed by the need to protect a beloved and vulnerable idea rather than remaining concerned with personal safety and well-being, as they had been throughout the British occupation. The message of Michelet’s *Jeanne d’Arc* is a call to arms, a reminder of the heroics of the past and the reason for continued motivation to protect and love their nation as they would a person. This personification was a manifestation of the necessary step towards the inspired change in the French citizen, the recognition of the importance of the *Patrie*.

The parallels of this mythological retelling of Joan of Arc with the use of allegory in the *Médan* texts is striking. While Françoise appears as a pure and unadulterated reflection of the personified *Patrie* of Michelet’s description²², Boule de suif’s context and role echo that of the *puelle* herself. Just as Joan demonstrated moral and physical self-sufficiency, Elisabeth could also be described as “une fille, une enfant, qui n’a de force que son coeur” (Michelet, *Jeanne d’Arc* 38). Rather than being content with the arrangement of easy collaboration ascribed to by the other French characters within the

²² “Zola never wrote any straight historical works, but as one would expect of a man of Taine’s and Michelet’s era and of an admirer of their works besides, he was imbued with the historical spirit and, as we shall see, eager to situate, explain and justify naturalist literature from a historical perspective” (Baguley 11). Zola was therefore completely familiar with Michelet’s work, and it is plausible that he would align his perfect France (both allegorical and geographical) with the pure allegory of the *Patrie* as described by Michelet. His purpose in doing so could be to once again show the depth to which France has fallen at the end of his tale, as well as address the general shift in nationalist philosophy from Michelet to 1880: from the universalist to the materialist.

narrative who follow every whim and regulation of the Prussian officer to avoid any personal harm or inconvenience, the prostitute manifests a firm patriotism that renders such actions immoral and unthinkable. Like Elisabeth, Joan was placed in a situation where her patriotism overshadowed that of those in authority, who should have been exemplary in this domain. “Joan had acted, to a large extent, against the advice Charles VII and his counselors, who regarded the Maid’s exploits with suspicion and who, content with the coronation, started negotiations with the Burgundians instead of continuing the struggle as Joan wanted, to drive the English ‘out of all France’” (Krumeich 64). The analogous willingness of the French during the Franco-Prussian war to negotiate their own safety and interests rather than the enemy’s departure shows an underlying lack of the national sentiment that both Michelet and Maupassant show to be necessary in the defense of the nation. In both cases, an invasive force threatens France, but does not meet any resistance except from those least likely to give it: a young virgin and a prostitute. In both cases, these protagonists meet similar fates.

After jeopardizing her life and well-being for the sake of her king and her country, Joan is abandoned, while on a smaller scale, *Boule de suif* reenacts the same drama. Again relying on Michelet’s account of Joan’s sacrifice, the depth of the injustice in her treatment is explored:

Tout est sauvé! La pauvre fille, de sa chair pure et sainte, de ce corps délicat et tendre, a émoussé le fer, brisé l’épée ennemie, couvert de son sein le sein de la France. La récompense, la voici. Livrée en trahison, outragée des barbares, tentée des pharisiens qui essayent en vain de la prendre par ses paroles, elle résiste à tout en ce dernier combat, elle monte

au-dessus d'elle-même, éclate en paroles sublimes, qui feront pleurer
éternellement... Abandonnée et de son roi et du peuple qu'elle a sauvés.

(38)

The similarities in their treatment—the betrayal, the abandonment, the barrage of persuasive and deceitful arguments—serve to uncover the fundamental difference in the two stories. While Joan of Arc underwent all of these things, she remained true to her inner principles, unshaken by the authoritative figures who attempted to convince her of her faults. Boule de suif, however, is a weakened version of the same. Her resolve and dedication to her patriotic morality are not strong enough to withstand the pressures of her companions, and her naiveté leads to her downfall. Through her actions, it is clear that her patriotic beliefs are aligned with Joan's: the nation is a sacred entity whose purity from invasive forces must be protected despite risk of personal harm.²³ Joan of Arc suffers and remains strong, creating a sanctified *Patrie* through her trials, while Boule de suif suffers and surrenders, signaling the end of true French patriotism. As the coach of passengers flees Rouen, they bring with them the remnant of Joan's martyrdom in that same city, an abused *Patrie* represented by Boule de suif, whom they symbolically betray throughout the story, so that sincere patriotism might cry as Jeanne did, "O Rouen, Rouen! dois-je donc mourir ici?" (qtd. in Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* 142). Maupassant presents a modern retelling of Joan of Arc, and through this, he denies the glorious and

²³ She manifests her own personal code in refusing to sleep with Cornudet, which the bourgeois Loiseau finds ridiculous. "Cette pudeur patriotique de catin qui ne se laissait point caresser près de l'ennemi" (98) is not a sentiment he shares. Furthermore, by refusing to see or obey the Prussian officer, and by refusing to allow soldiers to stay in her home despite personal consequences, she shows a concern for the purity of the nation. She is unwilling to do anything that would allow the Germans to feel more comfortable within France's borders, and thus shows a belief in its sanctity.

nationalist elevation of Joan that characterizes the political atmosphere of the Third Republic, reminding each French reader of their individual role in her betrayal through their apathy and self-preservation.

The congruence between *Boule de suif* and Michelet's *Jeanne d'Arc* continues in the dual nature of each heroine. Elisabeth is shown by the author to be both morally sincere and admirable in a sea of hypocrites, yet living in a manner traditionally considered sinful. Joan's character, given her unlikely and unusual associations and position within the army, has spurred endless debate as to her moral nature, well beyond the trials she underwent personally. "Fifteenth-century France found her both saint and sinner" (Harty 258). "Cette vivante énigme, cette mystérieuse créature, que tous jugèrent surnaturelle, cet ange ou ce démon" (Michelet 149), whom the church officially deemed idolatrous (Schibanoff 45), the English classified as a witch (Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* 96) and whose character has been examined and defined anywhere between prostitution, insanity and perfection. Maupassant plays with this idea of ambiguous purity in the very act that commits Elisabeth to sainthood. By sacrificing herself for the well-being of the many, she condemns herself through immorality, both in the traditional sense and according to her personal moral code, making her character ever more pathetic, trapped by the selfishness of those who pretend to be concerned with her welfare.

The land itself, beyond the geographical equivalence of Rouen, is also similar in these two accounts. In defining the historical context of Joan's arrival on the national scene, Michelet peels away the gleaming exterior of the legend, revealing "la sombre et laide époque, le monde de profonde boue, d'où surgit l'extraordinaire apparition" (Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* 39). Joan is an anomaly of her time, showing backbone under a

king famous for his lack thereof and producing action in an atmosphere of paralysis, truly an “extraordinaire apparition”, while *Boule de suif* shows the same characteristics in a similar context. This context is further defined by Michelet, who states:

Lorsque, des nobles historiens du XIVe siècle, on tombe au barbare et grossier chroniqueur qui ouvre le XVe (le Bourgeois de Paris), la chute est lourde ; on entre dans la pesante matérialité, dans un monde misérable et bas, qui ne sent qu’une chose, la faim. Ce triste chroniqueur n’est inquiète que du prix des denrées, de savoir s’il pourra se remplir ; le pain est cher, les légumes ont manqué, les vignes ont gelé, etc., etc. (40)

During this time, the land is frozen, and thoughts of food consume the population, including those keeping the records of the time. Between poverty and sickness, Paris lay suffering, yet “D’autres habitants y viennent la nuit, les loups, insolents, impudents, et ne craignant plus rien” (40). The obvious parallels with Maupassant are startling. The unproductive land, the lack of food, and the blatant selfishness and materialism manifest in the actions during the Franco-Prussian war, as related in *Boule de suif*, force an association between the two accounts, creating an uncomfortable reformulation of one of France’s most beloved and celebrated heroines. *Boule de suif* is what has become of the purity of the nation, and rather than attempting to in fact redeem this fallen ideal, the representative cross-section of society that surrounds her uses her in order to abandon their country for England. Putting a national heroine into an ostracized prostitute’s skin reminds the reader of several harsh realities that the monuments and celebrations gloss over so easily: the only success that Joan achieved was through the rallying of her fellow Frenchmen, and when they ceased to come to her aid, the French nation stood by and let

their savior burn. During the Franco-Prussian war, they reenacted this act of betrayal and indifference.

This idea is reiterated within the text of *Boule de suif*, through the reference to Joan of Arc near the end of the passengers' stay in Tôtes. "Le comte et le manufacturier se mirent à causer politique. Ils prévoyaient l'avenir de la France. L'un croyait aux d'Orléans, l'autre à un sauveur inconnu, un héros qui se révélerait quand tout serait désespéré: un Du Guesclin, une Jeanne d'Arc, peut-être?" (102). The pointed irony of such a discussion, while these very men have already contemplated and schemed the betrayal of Elisabeth and the consequent satisfaction of every whim of their enemy, becomes clear when one considers the only heroism within their group is what they plan to destroy. Looking for an outside source to save their skins without any personal implications is a major criticism of Maupassant, and one that he expresses through the similarities of these two stories: the success of Joan of Arc was only made possible through the support she received, and when this failed, she could only fail as well. The general return to materialist cares and negotiations led to her downfall as was clearly the case with *Boule de suif*. As Michelet cautions in his conclusion of the account of the young heroine's life, "il faut se garder bien d'en faire une légende; on doit conserver pieusement tous les traits, même les plus humains, en respecter la réalité touchante et terrible" (148). Maupassant and Zola clearly follow this injunction in a time that has forgotten it. The selective elevation of the Joan of Arc story—glorifying the miraculous and divinely appointed nature of her accomplishments, elevating her to the level of a national symbol while underplaying the actual role of the French people throughout the

saga—contributes to the trappings of nationalism that the Médan writers found so ridiculous and hypocritical.

The nationalist exploitation of Joan of Arc becomes clear when considering the transformation of her image with respect to the nationalist movement throughout the nineteenth century. Michelet's retelling of the life of Joan of Arc follows in the path of his other works in supporting the philosophy of nationalism of his time. As one historian asserted,

Michelet solved the problem of the potential conflict between patriotism and humanitarianism by making France equivalent to the universe. France, he believed, was not only destined to be the 'pilot of humanity's vessel,' but was also the incarnation of humanity. Consequently, if one defended France against some other country, one was not only defending France, one was defending humanity. (qtd. in Sternhell 30)

His universal conception of nationalism shows the influence of his philosophy upon his analysis of the Joan of Arc story. The holistic and sacred quality of the *Patrie* easily absorbs the religious nature of her achievements, translating an inspired mission into a patriotic victory.²⁴

However, the patriotism supported by Michelet varies substantially from the nationalism of the 1870s, when Joan's image became increasingly popular. Whereas his was a universal ideal, "un nationalisme missionnaire," "1870 marque un tournant.

²⁴ However, Joan of Arc was not easily separated from the Church, as "From the 1860s onwards the church itself adopted a similar view of Joan as popular heroine, the symbol of a rival *Catholic* nationalism, combining love of France with religious devotion" (Tombs 4).

Dorénavant, le sentiment national français deviendra particulariste, exaltera le caractère spécifique et unique de l'histoire et de la civilisation françaises, et s'opposera violemment au sentiment national d'autres pays, surtout s'ils ont des intérêts opposés à ceux de la France” (Reschef 151). No longer concerned with spreading the principles of the Revolution, nationalism became an idea of pushing the enemy out (Burns 59).²⁵ In this development, the story of Joan of Arc is directly relevant, as she is purported to have told the English, “Je suis cy venue de par dieu pour vous bouter hors de toute France” (qtd. in Krumeich 64). This sentiment of national elitism and exclusion led to Joan’s role in many radical groups, her statue in Paris remaining a gathering place since the late 1800s, “for nationalist rallies from Action Française to Le Pen” (Tombs 4). The very nature of her mission lent itself to extremist agendas, as “Jeanne qui cumulait la fidélité au roi et l’inspiration du ciel, était toute désignée pour concentrer en elle les vertus et les valeurs du nationalisme de droite” (Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir* 327). This model for religious devotion to an ideal reiterates the dangerous and demanding quality of nationalism discussed in the previous chapter. The use of Joan of Arc lent an aura of authority and divinity to the establishments that adopted her as their own, and the official support of her image indicated a dangerous proximity to the institution of a nationalist religion.

²⁵ There are, however, exceptions to this rule, as confirmed by the observation of pictorial representations of Joan published during this period. “Few, extremely limited clusters of postcards (and no posters) allude to a possible enemy. [...] The best example of apparent lack of concern is given by Joan of Arc. A well-known Catholic publisher, Desclée de Brouwer, launched twelve postcards devoted to the life of the Maid. It is absolutely impossible to infer from these naïve engravings whom Joan fought; those surrounding the stake on the twelfth in the series look so grieved that one is led to wonder why she was burnt. Simultaneously, Méliès produced a twelve-episode film which practically eliminates the nationality of the adversary. It will be argued that everybody in France knew who killed Joan. Indeed; yet there were no attempts in the field of new pictures to ridicule, insult, or even designate the English – or the Germans” (Sorlin 81).

By examining two of the most prevalent representative figures of the late nineteenth century, Joan of Arc, and Marianne, it becomes evident that the escapism so prevalent in the literature of the time is only more apparent in the visual representations that the government and dominant political parties chose to endorse. Both of these figures undergo a transformation during the decades following the Franco-Prussian war: rather than being used as a call to arms, the images and stories are softened. In the case of Marianne, official representations favor the removal of her “subversive” cap and a return to a pre-Revolutionary model, while Joan of Arc’s achievements smack of self-congratulatory French pride and entitlement rather than transmitting a sense of patriotic duty. The first two texts of *les Soirées de Médan* make specific references and present parallels to these artistic developments and social transformations, showing a keen awareness of the political role of female allegory under the current regime as they echo and parody these phenomena. The criticism of an obsessive preoccupation with image and the idealization of the Republic and the Nation, both defining characteristics of the prevailing nationalism, becomes more apparent through the lens of Zola and *Maupassant’s* allegorical ironies. Rather than dwelling on real accomplishments, this nationalism relies on echoes of the past, and though both Zola and Maupassant describe the catastrophic results of a lack of sincere love of the *Patrie*, an overzealous and idealized nationalism can only result in empty words and apathetic citizens.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to discuss why such a close and historically contextualized reading of *L'attaque du Moulin* and *Boule de Suif* is both legitimate and relevant. The fictional nature of these pieces does anything but remove them from the active political scene. As Renan stated, "In other countries, literature and society are quite distinct. In our country...they interpenetrate" (Hansen xiv). According to Flaubert, an important influence for the Médan project, "the didactic quality of his and his peers' novels made them 'le document historique par excellence'" (qtd. in Hansen xiv). The political awareness and acuity in these stories are accompanied by a subtlety that increases their effectiveness as political criticism. By using allegory, Zola and Maupassant were able to illustrate further and expose deeper meanings than a direct political tirade ever could: it is precisely through his vivid imagery that Maupassant's declamation of the propagandist literature of the time can truly be understood in its entirety. Fiction enabled these authors to explore their project to its fullest extent; allegory allowed them to clothe their scorn in living flesh. The open irony of both texts, as well as the deeper satire embedded in the allegorical nature of Françoise and Elisabeth, leave the reader with a lasting impression and a distinct sense of guilt and abhorrence for the behavior ascribed to the French citizens and army. As a result of this indirect representation, they transmit a message without immediately alienating the reader through an obvious call to repentance, and

unlike many of the specifically political publications of the day, we continue to enjoy, read and study the Médan texts.

The universal themes denounced within these texts are those that will continue to resonate with international readership: fear, hypocrisy, cowardice, materialism, and selfishness are all themes that each human being encounters, that each society must deal with, but that the French of 1880 seemingly refused to. The national and escapist tides that the Médan authors were fighting focused so essentially on appearances and manifested many of the traits of a national religion, both characteristics that understandably disturbed Zola, Maupassant, and like-minded intellectuals, and threatened to undermine the democratic nature of the very regime that supported this nationalist trend. The intensity of nationalist rhetoric, imagery, and a public willing to follow along all essentially represented a removal of the regime from the hands of the people into those of a deified, idealized state free of error and weakness. By focusing on the Franco-Prussian debacle, a period of distinct proof of general national deterioration, this project rendered the nation and her government human once again, with all of the weaknesses and strengths that humanity implies. The aim of this satirical collection was the “entrenched and rarely disputed public attitudes towards the 1870 disaster that were as prevalent in the press, in the songs of the ‘café-concert’ and in school text books as in literary works, attitudes that gave rise to such organizations as the Ligue des Patriotes which sought to inspire in the new generations of France a spirit of heroic vengeance” (Baguley 146). In this widespread phenomenon, the goal of propelling French citizens towards violence through hatred of the enemy and national pride is in itself disturbing, and its reliance upon lies and misrepresentations to build this national ego makes such a

movement not only insulting, but indicative of the irresponsibility of those instigating and supporting such developments. Such methods definitely merited the attention and criticism of literary intellectuals that observed this steady undermining and corruption of the political scene.

Further research into the role of allegory as political criticism in the visual arts would prove interesting, involving a larger cross-section of the population given the widespread dissemination of such images in the form of caricature and higher visual arts. Allegorical figures were rampant in political cartoons, especially throughout the 1870s. Looking at their representation in relation to officially sanctioned representations (e.g. Marianne, Joan of Arc) or such painters as Puvis de Chavannes, whose allegorical figures hearkened back to the classical tradition, would provide greater depth in defining the French Nation as it was conceived at this time. Continuing to chart the place of allegory throughout the Third Republic, as well as its forms of self-representation, would also be a fascinating study of the evolving preoccupation with image and appearance, if indeed it changes. The changes in allegorical representation itself, of both official and unofficial origins, and contemporary shifts in literary representations of the Nation could provide ample material for further study, as well as researching other works by these same authors that involve female allegory (Un duel, for example), and possible contemporary as well as foreign imitations of the antinationalist satire of *Les Soirées de Médan*.

Overreaching nationalism was not and is not an occurrence unique to the French situation. However, the importance of these texts comes in the specificity of their response to the political situation as they saw it, providing a model for French criticism to come. Referring to the *fin-de-siècle* writers and intellectuals, Eric Hansen states that

“The absurdities of government, which might have caused indifference or disenchantment among average men, created in them a deep despair and active hatred, strong traces of which may still be found in French thought today” (8). Rather than falling prey to the apathy of the Prussian occupation or the zeal of the new Republic, these authors chose “de donner à nos récits une note juste sur la guerre, de les *dépouiller*” (Maupassant), to reveal truth through their *bonne foi* rather than building up false glorifications, a constructive lesson in both the true nature of patriotism and the intricacy of political criticism. The brilliance of the project comes to light through its immortal imagery and its direct satire of this false nationalism through its own device: allegory.

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