**The Affair Before the Affair: Zola, Dreyfus and the Lourdes Scandal**

**Abstract:**

This article examines the legacy of the scandal wrought by Zola’s novel *Lourdes* (1894) for future controversy over the writer’s pivotal involvement in the Dreyfus Affair. Zola’s fictional account of the Pyrenean shrine—its founding apparitions, and its miracle cures— provoked a deluge of refutations from Catholic clergymen, doctors and writers. The Lourdes scandal has been understood as a flashpoint for Catholic indignation in the ongoing ‘culture wars’ of the Third Republic—one readily reignited with Zola’s intervention in the judicial handling of Dreyfus’ case. This article offers a more precise understanding of the Lourdes debates as a dress-rehearsal for the Affair that followed. It reads Catholic attacks on Zola’s naturalist novel for their shared preoccupation with proofs, expertise, authority and the status of truth and evidence, which anticipated the very terms on which his defense of the Jewish captain would be denounced. Both scandals, then, appear bound together by fundamentally literary concerns; and this article shows how quarrels over aesthetics lay at the heart of the ideological differences they described.

On 7 February 1898, Zola arrived at the Palais de Justice for the opening of his trial for libel, following the publication of his excoriatory open letter, ‘J’accuse..!’, on the front page of the left-wing newspaper *L’Aurore*. This fortnight-long public event, which resulted in Zola’s conviction, drew boisterous crowds to the Ile de la Cité, where the writer was greeted with taunts, and clashes between protesters ensued. *La Croix*, the daily newspaper published by the Assumptionist religious order, tracked the hearings with undisguised glee: the timing, it declared, could hardly be more felicitous. For the fourth day of Zola’s trial marked the fortieth anniversary of the Virgin Mary’s first apparition at Lourdes before the fourteen-year-old shepherdess, Bernadette Soubirous. This curious coincidence of dates gave Zola’s Catholic detractors every reason to believe in divine retribution: ‘Today, […] M. Zola, the blasphemer of the Immaculate Virgin, the mortal who ignored her beneficence, has been covered in shame in the Cours d’assises.’[[1]](#endnote-1) That Zola’s journey from his home to the Palais de Justice took him past the towering Notre-Dame cathedral each morning of the trial only encouraged those seeking to connect profanation and punishment.[[2]](#endnote-2) For the newspaper’s hostile readers, the vehicle for Zola’s slanderous, and unforgivable, attack on the Catholic faith would have been abundantly clear. This was his novel *Lourdes*, published in book form in July 1894, just two months before the fateful *bordereau* that implicated Dreyfus was discovered in a waste-paper bin at the German Embassy in Paris.[[3]](#endnote-3) The fall-out from Zola’s scandalous novel of the Catholic shrine thus overlapped with the first events of what would, four years hence, have turned into the ‘Affair’ of the century.

For *La Croix*’s readership, who numbered in the hundreds of thousands by the early 1890s, Zola’s intervention on Dreyfus’ behalf was readily understood as another shot across existing battle-lines.[[4]](#endnote-4) In the 12 February edition, these lines were redrawn by the very composition of the newspaper’s front page: the triumphalist lead article on the left, the Virgin’s immortal words writ large (‘I am the Immaculate Conception’), and the selective report of Zola’s trial on the right. Between them is lodged a tawdry piece of doggerel, ‘Émile’, in which the pseudonymous author Vulcain concocts a by-then familiar image of Zola as, variously, a grasping novelist *still* excluded from the Académie, an Italian in disguise and an unpatriotic besmircher of the army… The Dreyfusard Zola appears as the archetypal traitor―‘the friend of a Judas’―but he is also the bold Jason who ventured to Lourdes four years earlier, only to return ‘ashamed and defeated’ from his confrontation with an unfazed Virgin Mary. The association of these two exploits in the Catholic imagination was drawn with yet greater ferocity two days later, when a certain Pierre L’Ermite (to whom we shall return) penned a vitriolic article on the poetic justice at work in the timing of Zola’s trial―its incendiary title, ‘Flay him alive!’:

How fitting it is that the Fête de l’Apparition should fall on 11th February, the day on which General de Pellieux and M. Gribelin gave their depositions, the same day that saw this defiler of Lourdes crushed once and for all, after writing about *la Grivotte*, making money out of poor little Marie Lemarchand’s lupus, and knowingly lying the whole way through his work, in order to snatch from the Virgin the glory of one her most brilliant miracles―performed perhaps, in an act of supreme grace, for Zola himself![[5]](#endnote-5)

In a curious slippage, Zola’s trial for libel during the Affair appears as the punishment for another kind of defamation altogether: his adulteration in literary fiction of the miracle cures he was supposed to have witnessed during his fortnight-long visit to the Pyrenean shrine in the summer of 1892. In *Lourdes*, the first of his *Trois Villes* trilogy (1894-98), Zola rewrote the stories of three *miraculées* he had encountered: the above-mentioned Marie Lemarchand and Marie Lebranchu (renamed Élise Rouquet and La Grivotte respectively in Zola’s novel), along with Clémentine Trouvé, whose story Zola adapted via the character Sophie Couteau. While the shrine’s Medical Bureau certified their cures as acts of divine intervention, these cases were transposed in Zola’s narrative as either false diagnoses or the result of hysterical suggestion. Of all the causes of Catholic resentment Zola generated, this refutation of the Virgin’s beneficence was surely the most injurious, remaining an emblem for Catholics of the novelist’s ‘bad faith’.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The legacy of Zola’s *Lourdes* for the Dreyfus Affair is captured with particular clarity in *La Croix*’s hysterical commentary on the novelist’s trial. Indeed, as the newspaper most closely tied to the Assumptionist order that established the Lourdes pilgrimage, *La Croix* offers, as we shall see, an important bridge between the critical fall-out from Zola’s novel of the miracle and the subsequent anti-Zolaism that coloured the Catholic response to the Dreyfus Affair.[[7]](#endnote-7) Taking the newspaper’s rhetoric as its starting point, this article seeks to better understand the reasons why Zola’s novel of the miracle*―*and specifically the polemic it ignited―continued to resonate so forcefully in, above all Catholic, anti-Dreyfusard discourse. In the broadest sense, ascertaining the ongoing relevance of such debates means gauging how much Zola’s *Lourdes* still mattered towards the turn of the century. Figures tell one story: at the time of Zola’s death in 1902, *Lourdes* was outsold only by his epic of the Franco-Prussian war, *La Débâcle* (1892), and his novel of prostitution, *Nana* (1880).[[8]](#endnote-8) But it was also understood on both sides of the Dreyfus Affair that Zola was being pilloried for his interventions, to some degree, precisely *as* the author of *Lourdes*. When Jean Jaurès took the stand at Zola’s trial, he decried the festering resentments that lay behind the accusations Zola faced: ‘I know […] why some men hate him and hound him so! What they are pursuing is the man who upheld a rational and scientific interpretation of the miracle’.[[9]](#endnote-9) The vilified novelist was on trial, in reality, Jaurès implied, for his intellectual convictions.

In this article, I argue for a stronger connection between the two scandals than has been previously imagined―even for understanding the Lourdes controversy as something of a dress-rehearsal. Where links between episodes have been drawn by scholars, the repercussions of *Lourdes* tend to be described, and rightly so, as sealing Zola’s association in the Catholic imagination with a diabolical strain of anti-clericalism, thus kindling contempt that the Dreyfusard’s interventions would fully ignite. ‘For Catholics’, writes Ruth Harris, ‘all Zola’s views thereafter were contaminated by his attack on Lourdes. […] In their eyes his campaign for Dreyfus was another betrayal similar to the one he had perpetrated against Lourdes.’[[10]](#endnote-10) Insofar as this article pursues Harris’ claim, it occupies the space between her two indispensable histories of *Lourdes* (first published in 1999) and *Dreyfus* (first edition in 2010). In recounting how the latter led her back to the Pyrenean shrine, Harris cites the association of Catholic activism around Lourdes with anti-Republican and, indeed, anti-Dreyfusard positions: ‘some of the most gentle organizers of pilgrimage for the sick were also the most violent anti-Semites and most extreme anti-Dreyfusards’. Zola, too, sealed the connection: in the aftermath of the controversy over *Lourdes*, ‘both sides were ready to renew the battle […] when Zola became Dreyfus’ most famous champion’.[[11]](#endnote-11)

This essay builds on Harris’ assertion of an ideological continuum, specifically by scrutinising the debates that Zola’s fiction of the shrine ignited.[[12]](#endnote-12) In privileging the fall-out from Zola’s novel, I foreground its importance as a flashpoint for ongoing Catholic indignation. But I also demonstrate how this continuity hinges on more than the survival, even hardening, of purely ideological persuasions and resentments. I argue that Catholic critiques and refutations of Zola’s *Lourdes* directly prefigured those accompanying the novelist’s subsequent intervention in the judicial handling of Dreyfus’ case. There were, in other words, enough similarities between episodes that many of the same arguments used to contest Zola’s assertions about the Catholic shrine could be redeployed four years later in order to discredit his affirmations of the Jewish captain’s innocence. These arguments concerned, as we shall see, the illegitimacy of the novelist-cum-intellectual’s grounds and motives for meddling in affairs considered beyond his expertise, along with accusations, in each case, of fabrication and speculation. Still more insistently, Zola’s detractors centred on the writer’s purportedly questionable handling of proofs and evidence in establishing his claims to the truth—and this, I show, in a way which returned readers to longstanding aesthetic debates over the novelist’s bold assertions about the naturalist literature he championed. Above all, detractors of *Lourdes* disputed Zola’s claims to have rooted his naturalist, ‘experimental’ literary mode in facts, documents and observation. As a means of determining, that is—as Zola had put it in the closing line of his aesthetic manifesto *Le Roman expérimental* (1880)—‘natural phenomena, individual and social, for which metaphysics had hitherto provided only irrational and supernatural explanations’.[[13]](#endnote-13) Defending the divine status of the miracle against Zola’s objections meant reasserting a Catholic version of truth and authenticity, instead rooted in the singular and inimitable. It also meant dismantling the credibility Zola claimed to bear as both witness and writer. In his account of events, Zola had fallen prey, so his Catholic critics had it, to the very modes of speculation and conjecture that he had long declared antithetical to naturalist principles.

Certainly, the denigration of Zola, both before and during the Affair, was rooted in wider concerns than *Lourdes* alone—principally, a general distaste for his ‘scatological’ or ‘pornographic’ brand of naturalism. With the Affair, Christopher E. Forth has argued, Zola’s body (and belly) emerged as a ‘divisive issue’, a condensed symbol of cultural anxieties that had also been attached to his fiction—‘works [...] scandalously associated with excretion and with excrement itself’.[[14]](#endnote-14) Anti-Dreyfusards invoked the gamut of Zola’s fiction in their polemic―*Nana* was a particular favourite―as evidence of the author’s moral decrepitude.[[15]](#endnote-15) *L’Argent* (1891) and *La Débâcle*, meanwhile, furnished Zola’s enemies with proof of his true ideological colours: the former was cited as a disclosure of the novelist’s own anti-Semitism, while the latter, in which Zola had been critical of the French high command, became a shorthand for his lack of patriotism, and thus for his involvement in the German-Jewish Syndicate.[[16]](#endnote-16) In this respect, ‘Zola’s engagement [in the Dreyfus Affair] became’, as Pascaline Hamon suggests, ‘a new lens through which to read, or reread, the novelist’s works’.[[17]](#endnote-17) Those who had long objected to Zola’s naturalist fiction were, by and large, predisposed to stand against him when he intervened in the Affair. For Ferdinand Brunetière—literary critic, ardent antinaturalist, converted Catholic and anti-Dreyfusard—Zola’s championing of the Jewish captain was, Harris writes, ‘as base as his fiction’: ‘an exhibitionist attempt to sully the army and degrade the nation’.[[18]](#endnote-18) In the hands of Zola’s chief critic, ideological and aesthetic persuasions readily coincided, and in ways which pointed to a wider continuum of antinaturalist and anti-Dreyfusard discourses.

In returning to the Lourdes debates here, we shall see how refutations of Zola’s novel, like the Catholic anti-Dreyfusard attacks that followed, involved mobilising existing antipathies, as well as the precise terms of longstanding literary critiques of the naturalist’s methods. The article thus seeks to nuance existing accounts of the Dreyfus Affair and of its role in the ‘birth’ of the intellectual, which have tended to conjure up literary and aesthetic debates almost exclusively in terms of a set of broad allegiances, translating—however imperfectly—to affinities on either side of the Dreyfus divide. In this, Christophe Charle’s Bourdieusian account of the literary field has been influential, establishing the sociological conditions that underpinned the position of writers, of movements, and their relationship to the Dreyfus case.[[19]](#endnote-19) Through her excavation of avant-garde periodicals of the early 1890s, Venita Datta has, meanwhile, rooted in literary writing some of the key forces, not least an emerging antipostivism and antinaturalism, that polarised ‘the first official “intellectual” generation’, which came of age with the Affair.[[20]](#endnote-20) By focusing on the prime figure of the avant-garde’s disdain, this article makes its own contribution, of course, to that ‘prehistory’. In one respect, the scandal of Zola’s *Lourdes* further seals, as we shall see, those familiar correspondences of literary and political allegiance that Charle and Datta track. But this episode also offers, I argue, more subtle insights into the role of literary history in establishing the terms of the Dreyfus Affair, allowing us to see how literary arguments connoted more than a clash of credos. For this was an ideological struggle frequently played out in the terms of literary criticism—and not just as another attack on the caricaturally overdetermined version of naturalism that Forth describes, in his account of Zola as Dreyfusard.[[21]](#endnote-21) The task of discrediting the writer—of delegitimising his intervention—also meant, as we shall see, determining lapses and inconsistencies in the literary project he claimed to set himself. Indeed, what will emerge from our close attention to key moments in Catholic refutations of Zola’s *Lourdes* is just how the language of aesthetics―not least that of plausibility, realism, and faithfulness—was harnessed to make competing claims over the legitimacy of the writer’s intervention, as well as to the version of the ‘truth’ each side sought to tell. It is in this complex interlacing of ideology and aesthetics that the legacy of Lourdes for Dreyfus will be understood.

I

If Zola was no stranger to controversy throughout his career, rarely had quite so much ink been spilled over his fiction than in the weeks and months that followed the publication of *Lourdes*. Shortly after the final instalments had appeared in *Gil Blas*, Zola’s wife Alexandrine described their billiards table covered with article cuttings: ‘it is quite extraordinary to see how much has been written about this book’.[[22]](#endnote-22) Structured around five days of national pilgrimage, the novel recounts the frustrated love affair between a priest, Pierre Froment, who is struggling to regain his faith, and Marie de Guersaint, his childhood friend, who has travelled to Lourdes in search of a miracle, having been disabled by a riding accident. The novel’s centrepiece is Marie’s long-awaited cure, following a feverish night spent alone at the sacred grotto. But where Marie believes her recovery to be an act of the Virgin’s beneficence, Pierre concludes―following the initial diagnosis of Marie’s physician―that her illness is hysterical, and therefore that her cure is to be explained on psychological grounds, rather than as an act of divine intervention. Further cases that Pierre encounters during his visits to the shrine’s Medical Bureau only compound his doubts over the legitimacy of those miracles it claims to certify; and the novel concludes with Pierre’s reflections, as he returns to Paris, on the pitiful condition of mankind, and its desperate recourse to illusion as the antidote to suffering.

Across the many Catholic responses to *Lourdes* that appeared in the aftermath of its publication, two main points of controversy returned. First was Zola’s denial of those miracle cures he was supposed to have witnessed during his stay, and which he transposed in his narrative. Second was Zola’s retelling in the novel of the historical events that led to the foundation of the shrine, namely his attempt to offer a rational explanation for Bernadette’s visions of the Virgin Mary at the Massabielle grotto.[[23]](#endnote-23) The decision was taken to place the novel on the Index of Forbidden Books that September―the Pope likely alerted to the controversy by Monseigneur Ricard, a high church official from Aix-en-Provence, whose indictments of Zola’s novel appeared in the national press, and were published together as *La Vraie Bernadette de Lourdes: Lettres à M. Zola* (Paris, 1894). The wider media frenzy Zola’s novel provoked undoubtedly played a part in the Vatican’s decision.[[24]](#endnote-24) On 25 January the following year, all of Zola’s existing works were added to the Index, although this official condemnation did not stem the wider flow of Catholic refutations. Alongside press articles, and readers’ letters (both private and open), many critiques took the form of clerical pamphlets, such as Père Raphaël Ballerini’s *Lourdes: le miracle et la critique d’Émile Zola* (Liège, 1894), Abbé Paulin Moniquet’s *Un mot à M. Émile Zola et aux détracteurs de Lourdes* (Paris, 1894), Abbé Eugène Duplessy’s two-volume *Zola et Lourdes* (Paris, [1895]), and Abbé Joseph Crestey’s *Le Lourdes de Zola: critique d’un roman historique* (Paris, 1894). Meanwhile, the Catholic doctor Dominique Moncoq sold 35 thousand copies of his *Réponse complète au ‘Lourdes’ de M. Zola* (Caen, 1894) in the two years after its publication.[[25]](#endnote-25) Most prominent, however, were the responses of two figures Zola had met in person during his visit to Lourdes: the director of the Medical Bureau, Gustave Boissarie (*Zola. Conférence du Luxembourg*, Paris, 1895); and the Catholic author Henri Lasserre, who penned his immensely successful history *Notre-Dame de Lourdes* (1868) after his blindness was cured during his pilgrimage to the shrine. Lasserre’s letters to Zola were published as a collection in 1894 (*Les Lettres de Henri Lasserre à l’occasion du roman de Zola: avec pièces justificatives, démentis et défi*), and a series of his interviews on the subject with Louis Colin appeared in a volume in the same year (*Ce que pense Henri Lasserre du roman d’Émile Zola*). What emerges from this set of near-contemporaneous responses is, we shall see, a striking, if unsurprising, homogeneity: authors frequently cross-reference one another, and tend to harness many of the same terms and arguments in their attempts to dismantle Zola’s narrative. In invoking some of these protagonists and their specific refutations of *Lourdes* through this discussion, the point is to determine common concerns that prefigure debates to come with Zola’s involvement in the Dreyfus Affair. It is, however, far more difficult to trace the specific connections between these interventions and the subsequent adoption of anti-Dreyfusard politics, even if some broader ideological sympathies can be gleaned from ongoing relationships.[[26]](#endnote-26) Take Lasserre―perhaps the most vocal and famous detractor of Zola’s *Lourdes*―whose friendship with the arch anti-Semite and anti-Dreyfusard Édouard Drumont dated back to the latter’s youth, and their time in Paris as journalists.[[27]](#endnote-27) In *La Dernière Bataille* (1890), Drumont declared his profound admiration for Lasserre’s history of Lourdes, and subsequently suggested that he put himself forward for a seat at the Académie. Lasserre declined, declaring his vanity satisfied with Drumont’s vote alone and ‘a seat in your illustrious circle’. It was best, he lamented, not to run the risk that a freethinking majority might choose to cast its votes instead on ‘that Zola who wrote, about Lourdes, the work you know very well’.[[28]](#endnote-28) More broadly, of course, there was, as Harris shows, no such thing as a unified Catholic response to the Dreyfus Affair. A rule of neutrality meant that the Church did not officially intervene in the debate, and most bishops did not break their silence.[[29]](#endnote-29) But this also, ultimately, indicated a tacit allegiance with the views peddled by the Catholic press, with many bishops distributing issues of *La Croix*―by its own proclamation, ‘the most anti-Jewish newspaper in France’―from the pulpit.[[30]](#endnote-30) Meanwhile, the Henry Monument―the public subscription launched on 14 December 1898 by the anti-Semitic newspaper *La Libre Parole* to help Colonel Henry’s widow after his suicide―counted over 300 contributions from clergymen, many of which were accompanied by anti-Semitic remarks.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The overwhelming hostility to Dreyfus among Catholics was rooted in a wider reaction against the often militant secularism of the Republic, which pitted ‘two Frances’ against one another, each with its own set of values. But more specifically, it was, as both Harris and Kaufman have suggested, the militant influence of the Assumptionists that reached across the histories of Lourdes and Dreyfus at the end of the century.[[32]](#endnote-32) Founded in the 1860s under the charismatic direction of Père Emmanuel d’Alzon, the Assumptionist order established the national pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1875, in the wake of the failed Bourbon Restoration, as part of a wider campaign to mobilise Catholics against the positivism and individualism of Republican ideology.[[33]](#endnote-33) They reached the peak of their powers, however, with the Dreyfus Affair, during which they led the Catholic campaign against the Jewish officer, via their propaganda arm, *La Croix*. The newspaper’s chief editor, Père Vincent de Paul Bailly, was a media mastermind; he established the Maison de la Bonne Presse in 1877 and turned it ‘into the largest and most influential publishing house in France’; he transformed the weekly, *Le Pèlerin*, with an appealing format and abundant illustrations, and relaunched *La Croix* as a daily in 1883, penning numerous articles himself under the pseudonym ‘Le Moine’―including the piece on Zola’s trial with which I began.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Together with the interventions of the republican press, and Zola himself, the mobilisation of the Assumptionist *La* *Croix* constituted, as Kaufman suggests, one of the primary continuities between the Lourdes and Dreyfus episodes.[[35]](#endnote-35) In the weeks that followed the publication of *Lourdes*, *La Croix* provided a space in which the Catholic reaction could unfold: it publicised, and enthusiastically endorsed, refutations that would spare believers the temptation of reading the novel itself; it reproduced open letters from clerics, as well as those Lasserre addressed directly to Zola. Less highmindedly, it whipped up a sense of hysteria about the dangers the novel posed. In what we might call a ‘petit fait faux’, one reader of *La Croix* was reported to have been burned by unknowingly picking up a concealed copy of Zola’s *Lourdes* at Toulouse train station.[[36]](#endnote-36) The ‘reaction’ to Zola’s novel was, then, amplified by the newspaper in the broadest terms, its ire no doubt galvanised by the author’s portrayal of the Pères de l’Assomption as greedily capitalising on the credulity of pilgrims.[[37]](#endnote-37) But the association of medical and clerical refutations of *Lourdes* with the ideological positions of *La Croix* can be tracked most clearly via the figure of Abbé Edmond Loutil, who penned thousands of articles for the newspaper under the pseudonym Pierre L’Ermite, including his vilification of Zola during the Affair, ‘Flay him alive!’ L’Ermite was an ardent polemicist, whose journalistic flair was appreciated by right-wing Catholics seeking a counter-weight to Zola’s campaign.[[38]](#endnote-38) The priest Eugène Duplessy, who had challenged Zola’s account of the miracle at Lourdes across several articles, waxed lyrical about L’Ermite’s tireless and heroic championing of the truth, long after Dreyfus’ exoneration: ‘What truth has he not defended?’, he asked readers of *La Croix* in 1913. ‘What virtue has he not extolled?’[[39]](#endnote-39) Such complicities offer a troubling example of how anti-Dreyfusism outlived the Affair’s dénouement. Indeed, it was only on the centenary of Zola’s ‘J’accuse..!’ that *La Croix* proffered a repentant reflection on L’Ermite’s incendiary article on Zola, as well as the wider anti-Semitism it peddled.[[40]](#endnote-40)

L’Ermite’s most conspicuous connection, however, was with Dr Gustave Boissarie, the director of the Medical Bureau at Lourdes between 1891 and 1914. During Zola’s fortnight-long visit, Boissarie had welcomed the novelist into his Bureau, as an observer of his team’s procedures for assessing the legitimacy of those who claimed to have been cured at the shrine.[[41]](#endnote-41) But the doctor failed to convert, or convince, his sceptic; and the resulting novel mounted a challenge to the scientific authority embodied by Boissarie―or rather, by his unflattering double in *Lourdes*, Doctor Bonamy, whose clumsy handling of the Bureau’s supposedly rigorous procedures leaves plenty of room for doubt. Boissarie’s reply came in the form of a lecture given in Paris at the Cercle du Luxembourg on 21 November 1894.[[42]](#endnote-42) Widely reported by the Parisian press, this great media event brought together an educated audience (largely made up of medical students and doctors) in the aim of invalidating a narrative that was held to be injurious. L’Ermite reported on the lecture in an article in *La Croix*, entitled ‘To M. Zola’, and in which he recalled having sat next to the novelist, two years earlier, during his visit to the Medical Bureau.[[43]](#endnote-43) The apex of Boissarie’s spectacle, L’Ermite recounted, was the triumphant presentation of several *miraculées*, including Marie Lemarchand (Zola’s Élise Rouquet), whose story the novelist had adulterated by denying her cure. Carefully stage-managing a confrontation between the pilgrim’s body and Zola’s text, several extracts of which Boissarie read aloud, the doctor allowed his audience to contemplate not only the force of divine intervention, but also the injustice of Zola’s portrait, in what was, L’Ermite declared, ‘something akin to the Blessed Virgin’s revenge’.

Boissarie’s lecture was published by the Maison de la Bonne Presse the following year; and it was L’Ermite who framed the doctor’s response, adding three further paratexts―‘Why this Booklet?’, ‘Before the Lecture and ‘After the Lecture’―in which he justified Boissarie’s heroic, if reluctant, decision to publicly deny Zola’s insinuations and defend the Catholic faith. The intervention itself was captured in the language of reparation: its purpose was to undo the harm done by Zola’s novel, gathering ‘*all* friends of the Blessed Virgin’ around the ‘UNIQUE and *indisputable* authority’ of the doctor.[[44]](#endnote-44) For if, as L’Ermite would have it, Boissarie and Zola were engaged in a ‘duel […] to the death’ (x), it was one subject to a fundamental asymmetry. Zola’s self-fashioning as a ‘doctor of social sciences’ (77) is derided as pomposity in the face of Boissarie’s qualifications: ‘he who provoked [the doctor] on *medical* and *scientific* grounds is neither a *doctor* nor a *scholar*!’[[45]](#endnote-45) L’Ermite’s protest was emblematic; across refutations of *Lourdes*, the novelist was put on trial for his lack of expertise in the medical and ecclesiastical matters he described. Duplessy devoted several pages to the liturgical minutiae over which Zola had stumbled, while for Abbé Joseph Crestey, the novelist’s ignorance of the most fundamental details of Catholic doctrine clearly undermined ‘his reputation as a painstaking analyst’.[[46]](#endnote-46) Accordingly, vast swathes of Zola’s novel were reproduced by his detractors, who engaged in a kind of extended *commentaire de texte*. Pointing to lapses or inconsistencies in Zola’s account offered one way of reclaiming authority over the Lourdes narrative. So too did proving one’s superior credentials as an arbiter of events. To this end, the Catholic doctor Dominique Moncoq reproduced, as part of his response to Zola’s novel, an attestation from a colleague of his own accomplishments in the field of medicine: ‘It will at least prove to M. Zola that there are still some *intellectuals* among the believers.’[[47]](#endnote-47) As his emphasis suggests, the term ‘intellectual’ was already contested for its tendency to connote the incompatibility of faith and scientific inquiry. Refuting Zola’s claims meant throwing one’s own professional ‘capital’ behind this recurring interrogation: what right did the novelist have to challenge doctors and clerics on their own terrain?

In this sense, the Catholic ‘reaction’ to Zola’s novel can be understood to rehearse in miniature some of the struggles over the claims of intellectuals―those Maurice Barrès famously described as wielding their ‘half-culture’ [demi-culture]―with the explosion of the Dreyfus Affair.[[48]](#endnote-48) In the wake of Zola’s trial for libel, Brunetière declared a similar scepticism before the right of the ‘intellectual’ to assume any superior authority in matters beyond his specialism. The critic’s crosshairs were trained on the naturalist writer: ‘However famous he might be, the novelist’s intervention in questions of military justice seem to me as out of place as a colonel’s intervention in questions about the origins of romanticism’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Matters of expertise aside, what defenders of Lourdes shared with anti-Dreyfusards was the conviction that the ideals and universalist principles to which Zola and his like cleaved were in fact underwritten by a combination of vanity and self-interest.[[50]](#endnote-50) Zola’s detractors deplored his air of arrogance; in the words of Abbé Crestey, ‘this way he has of placing himself as a critic, in matters of history and medicine, above the whole of mankind’.[[51]](#endnote-51) Moreover, almost invariably, they accused him of making money out of Lourdes and its pilgrims. For Moncoq, Zola’s insinuations that Dr Boissarie understood the shrine as a lucrative business could only be made by ‘a man for whom money is everything’.[[52]](#endnote-52) Others, such as Lasserre, remained adamant that Zola’s version of Lourdes was driven by personal interest. For to have admitted the authenticity of the miracle cures he witnessed at the shrine would have been to damage both his reputation and his sales. Zola dismissed Lasserre’s accusations in an interview with *L’Echo de Paris*, claiming that it was precisely such an admission that would have boosted his readership: ‘It is, on the contrary, a Catholic conclusion that would have made for *an affair*’.[[53]](#endnote-53) It took little for these suspicions about Zola’s motives to resurface during the Dreyfus scandal, where they were typically attached to anti-Semitic tropes. In his interview with *La Libre Parole* on 4 February 1898―three days before Zola’s trial―Catholic novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans offered a characteristically unequivocal reading of Zola’s role in the Affair: ‘Zola took the side of the Jews because of his hatred of the Church and his love of the golden calf’.[[54]](#endnote-54) *Lourdes* hovered over such readings of Zola’s Dreyfusard campaign, which appeared as a pretext for a different ideological mission: the further denigration of a Catholic institution under threat.

II

Convictions about the illegitimacy of Zola’s interrogation of medical and clerical authorities thus blended with ideological persuasions to produce a kind of counter-discourse—one that could easily be redeployed during the Dreyfus Affair. But if the Lourdes debates represent a touchstone for Catholic anti-Dreyfusards, it was also, I shall now suggest, because they turned, as the Dreyfus Affair would, on the same epistemological, and indeed aesthetic, questions about truths and fictions, authenticity and fakes, documents, proofs and counter-proofs. In one straightforward sense, Zola’s involvement in the Dreyfus Affair could be understood by his Catholic detractors as a repetition of the entirely wilful refusal of evidence he had previously displayed in his handling of the Lourdes cures. Take, for instance, this commentary in *La Croix* on the accusations made by Zola against the military, and for which he now stood on trial:

This chap goes to Lourdes, and witnesses there the tangible, visible cures of cases of lupus, cancer, consumption, as well as the doctors’ formal declarations. It makes no difference to him: he refuses to accept the evidence and insults Our Lady of Lourdes. This same Zola finds himself before a terrible traitor, and with nothing but rumours and false documents for proof, hurries to the traitor’s defence.[[55]](#endnote-55)

Zola’s claims about the Catholic shrine were thus understood as a precedent: in both cases, the novelist not only challenged the evidence provided, but relied on flawed conjectures in constructing his own counter-thesis. The novelist’s scepticism over the miracle cure was, as this example suggests, a prime illustration of his dilettantish disregard for those proofs legitimated by authority. But it was Zola’s questioning of the shrine’s founding narrative that mobilised his adversaries in ways that spoke most clearly to the terms of the Affair that followed.

These historiographical claims pertained to Bernadette’s childhood prior to the eighteen apparitions of the Virgin Mary that she encountered in the Massabielle Grotto between 11 February and 16 July 1858, and on which the Lourdes sanctuary, and its transformation into a healing shrine, rested. For the clergy, the authenticity of the apparitions could be gauged by certain striking peculiarities: the unorthodox appearance of the Virgin that Bernadette described; and the identity she was said to have declared―‘I am the Immaculate Conception’ (in Bernadette’s native patois, ‘Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou’). The very implausibility of the young, illiterate peasant speaking the language of the Papal decree―the dogma had been promulgated only four years earlier―confirmed for many that the apparitions were a manifestation of divine grace. According to the then Bishop of Tarbes, Bertrand-Sévère Laurence, ‘[Bernadette] saw things she had never seen before, heard a language she had never heard before, and which she can recall without understanding its meaning.’[[56]](#endnote-56) Zola struck at these assumptions by claiming that Bernadette may, in fact, have been subject to the influence of the local priest in her village of Bartrès, Abbé Ader. Alerted to Ader by Jean Barbet, who had been a schoolteacher in Bartrès at the time of the apparitions and had since penned the *Guide de Lourdes et de la Grotte* (1892), Zola came to believe that the parish vicar acted as Bernadette’s spiritual guide. Zola met Barbet during his visit to Lourdes, and gleaned details about communal life in Bartrès, from which he constructed a hypothesis: that Bernadette had been exposed to formative stories, through ‘veillées’ authorised by Ader, and iconography in her local Church, which together predetermined her visions.[[57]](#endnote-57) Zola seized above all on Barbet’s admission that Abbé Ader had harboured a certain fascination with Bernadette, for she supposedly reminded him of the child visionaries of La Salette: ‘I don’t know what comes over me’, Ader is said to have admitted, ‘but each time I encounter this child, I feel as though I am seeing the little shepherds of La Salette’.[[58]](#endnote-58) Barbet’s account of the priest’s fixation seemed to provide Zola with a way of explaining the nature of the visions that followed. Had Ader not planted the story Bernadette would go on to reproduce? In *Lourdes*, Zola had his narrator speculate along these lines: ‘And one day, after catechism, or even during the evening vigil, had he not told the wonderful story […] of the Lady in the dazzling dress […]?’[[59]](#endnote-59) Abbé Ader’s absence from histories of Lourdes seemed to Zola both conspicuous and suggestive. On the omission of the priest from Lasserre’s account―‘the most complete, and the most thorough […] book’―he wrote in *Le Figaro*: ‘This seems incredible and there is certainly a gap here that allows for all kinds of assumptions.’[[60]](#endnote-60) For Zola, the oversight signalled a contrived censorship of the priest’s mediating role, and was enough to legitimate the conjectures he had made.

Disputations of the novelist’s claims arrived thick and fast. Monseigneur Ricard published a letter from Zola’s source, Barbet, in which the retired schoolteacher denied having told Zola any anecdote about Abbé Ader’s peculiar interest in Bernadette.[[61]](#endnote-61) The municipal council of Bartrès, meanwhile, wrote an open letter ‘in the name of truth, which has been distorted most audaciously’, and in which they refuted Zola’s portrait of village life, and of their church as a hotbed of phantasmagoria―‘a place where the child’s pious imagination is supposed to have been excited by the sight of altars, sumptuously dressed in rich gilding, and blue-eyed virgins with scarlet lips’. Zola took up both accusations on the front page of *Le Figaro* on 31 August, reproducing the council’s letter in full. These rural *fonctionnaires* were, he implied, in the pockets of the Pères de la Grotte, in whose interest it was to deny the facts he had brought to light about Bernadette’s childhood, and which cast doubt on ‘the whole classic story of the visionary’. Dismissing Barbet’s denial in turn as an act of self-protection, Zola cited the teacher’s references to Ader in his *Guide de Lourdes*, and reiterated his conviction that more evidence awaits discovery: ‘a wholly comprehensive file exists, made up of conclusive documents and private letters’, with which an independent historian might construct the definitive narrative of Bernadette’s life.

In pointing towards proofs as yet unearthed, Zola could do little but hint at a cover-up; and as a result, his detractors railed further against the ‘false witnesses’ and spurious documentation on which his case rested. To prove, once and for all, the illegitimacy of Zola’s claims, one priest from Marseille, Abbé Beleau, presented the novelist with a wager, published in *Le Soleil du Midi*, and taken up by *La Croix* on 4 October 1894.[[62]](#endnote-62) Claiming Zola had been caught ‘in the act of fabricating legends’, Beleau proposed the following: first, that they would each name two judges, who would together compose a tribunal, before which Zola would declare that his account of Bernadette’s life was historical; then, the novelist would be asked to produce a single authentic document or trustworthy witness account that could validate his version of events. Beleau offered Zola ten thousand francs to make the first declaration, and the same again for the proof―his one condition that the trial take place in the open, and all documents be made public. Lasserre spoke approvingly of such tactics as a means of forcing the novelist into a corner and demanding he confess his lies.[[63]](#endnote-63) Predictably, though, Zola did not respond to Beleau’s wager; and his silence was duly taken as an admission of guilt.[[64]](#endnote-64)

It is surely a testament to the parallels between the Lourdes and Dreyfus episodes that the former is so frequently captured in the language of the law. As Jason Szabo argues, ‘Discussions about Lourdes resembled legal exchanges more than medical debates, as the prosecution and defense sought to sway observers (both lay and scientific) by any and all means available’.[[65]](#endnote-65) The Lourdes polemic dealt in rival narratives, each of which appealed, at least rhetorically, to an impartial authority that could discern legitimate from illegitimate claims. Where Zola’s detractors placed his novel on trial, the author cited Truth as his alibi in ways that prefigured his pro-Dreyfus discourse to come, and which in turn provoked a similar strain of derision. In the words of Abbé Crestey, Zola cast himself as ‘the pontiff of the truth’.[[66]](#endnote-66) Lasserre, meanwhile, frustrated by Zola’s failure to engage with his accusations, sent up the novelist’s oblique terms of defence by imagining how these might sound in court:

* Accused, what is your profession?
* Your honour, *I am proud of my work*. For thirty years now I have been *bringing the truth to light* [*je FAIS la vérité*].[[67]](#endnote-67)

Lasserre thus dismissed the novelist’s self-important grandiloquence, together with the specious logic by which he justified his intervention. When, four years later, Zola’s address to the jury during his trial for libel was (selectively and unfaithfully) reported in *La Croix*, it was precisely the same logic that came under fire, albeit heavily accented with a particular strain of xenophobic patriotism: ‘Upon my forty years of hard work, I swear that *Dreyfous* is innocent. (*Proofs*, they cry, *keep on repeating yourself, Venetian!*)’.[[68]](#endnote-68)

For Lasserre, Zola’s claims to ‘faire la vérité’ were true only in the most literal sense, that is, as a process of fabrication. While he underscored his own credentials as a rigorous historian, he accused Zola of abusing the creative right of the novelist. For what Zola had produced was not so much a work of fiction as, to adopt Lasserre’s metaphor, a counterfeit. Of *Lourdes* Lasserre declared:

This is not a work of imagination, but a work of false testimony. Only the tiniest proportions of truth are to be found inside—those needed by counterfeiters in order to plate their copper or lead and then pass them off as money to those countless gullible individuals who are incapable of seeing through appearances or of weighing anything up… This large volume against faith is, more to the point, without any good faith.[[69]](#endnote-69)

All that remains in Zola’s novel is a *residual* truth―a trace of veracity that allows the novelist-counterfeiter to transform base metal into accepted currency. In Lasserre’s account of mimetic fiction as counterfeit, credulity has, paradoxically, become the domain of the sceptic, who is unable to distinguish authentic from fake. Where Zola had repeatedly described Bernadette as ‘a legend’ and the narrative of her apparitions as a ‘a nice tale’ [beau conte], Lasserre turns those terms against him and, like other Catholic detractors, decries the implausibility of the novelist’s own hypotheses.[[70]](#endnote-70) The ‘entirely clumsy, blunt, thinly-disguised untruths’ that he served up to his readers could only capture, they insisted, the most impressionable of minds.[[71]](#endnote-71) At stake in those refutations of Zola’s *Lourdes*, then, was a struggle over believability, or more precisely, plausibility―and this in ways that anticipated Zola’s interventions in the Dreyfus Affair to come. For in both cases, Zola set out to stigmatise a version of events that required a suspension of disbelief. The case for Dreyfus’ guilt was described by Zola variously as a ‘nursemaid’s tale’, a ‘legend’ and ‘the most brazen conspiracy of lies’, all disseminated by an irresponsible press that stretches its readers’ credulity to breaking point: ‘it churns out so many idiotic stories that even children struggle to believe them in the end’.[[72]](#endnote-72) Indeed, what appears in Zola’s journalism as the most outlandish, or implausible, of claims―the thesis, put forward by criminologist Alphonse Bertillon, that Dreyfus had forged his own handwriting on the *bordereau*―could, Zola insisted, easily be dispelled: ask any child on the street to examine the proofs, and he will declare the striking identity of Esterhazy’s writing with that of the incriminating document.[[73]](#endnote-73)

What Zola sought to establish, in both cases, was the certainty of doubt: the conviction, that is, that an alternative narrative, as yet undisclosed, would soon displace the sanctioned one. Where this conviction hinged either on the lacuna in Lasserre’s history, or on the conspicuous hole in the military’s case for the prosecution―namely, the false evidence of the *bordereau*―Zola necessarily relied on speculation, conjecture and counter-hypotheses to create a rival version of events, which promised to be validated by the further disclosure of evidence it announced. In the Lourdes debates, it was precisely this harnessing of the imagination that Zola’s Catholic detractors decried; and in doing so, they effectively returned to certain commonplace critiques of his naturalist aesthetics. ‘Although he presents himself as someone who simply records impressions of real life’, wrote Crestey, ‘he has lapsed into pure fantasy’.[[74]](#endnote-74) For Monseigneur Ricard, Zola’s disputation of the apparitions as acts of divine intervention, and his search for a natural cause that could explain them, required the embellishment of an overactive mind: ‘you cloak this explanation in all the colours that your brilliant imagination is capable of giving to the notions it dreams up’.[[75]](#endnote-75) Critics thus sought to undermine the naturalist novelist’s claims to objectivity: not only, they insisted, was he an entirely unreliable witness of events in Lourdes, he was prone to what we would now call ‘confirmation bias’.[[76]](#endnote-76) In Crestey’s words, ‘his mental vision is filtered through the crystal of his biases, and this might embellish everything from his perspective, but in reality it only distorts and diminishes’.[[77]](#endnote-77)

This stigmatisation of Zola’s imagination as a source of prejudicial distortion and falsification was aimed at the novelist’s specific betrayals of those he encountered at the shrine. But it also clearly drew its terms from the wider antinaturalist discourse of certain literary critics, from Jules Lemaître and Brunetière to Léon Bloy, whose virulent anti-Zola diatribe, ‘The Cretin of the Pyrenees’, took direct aim at *Lourdes*.[[78]](#endnote-78) Among these, Brunetière had been the most prominent, gaining notoriety through his public hostility to Zola. In *Le Roman naturaliste* (1883), Brunetière had decried the novelist’s poor taste and lack of idealism, as well as his waning powers of observation—this despite his pretentions to root his fiction in faithful documentation. Again, in ‘The Bankruptcy of Naturalism’ (1887), Brunetière steered a wider backlash against the author following the publication of *La Terre* that year, claiming that Zola’s naturalism lacked precisely the documentary value and authentic proofs that it purported to convey: instead, ‘M. Zola reconstructs nature and adapts it to the demands of his own hallucinations’. Just as in his satire of bourgeois private lives *Pot-Bouille* (1883), this latest novel contained ‘no awareness and no observation, no truth, and no accuracy’.[[79]](#endnote-79) Brunetière spoke no more of Zola’s fiction until the two first volumes of *Les* *Trois Villes* (*Lourdes* and *Rome*) appeared. Coinciding with his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1895, the novels sparked, as Antoine Compagnon suggests, a further period of hostility, and a renewed disdain for Zola’s scientism that spoke clearly to the rise of spiritualism through the decade.[[80]](#endnote-80) Instead, the critic and *académicien* promoted the ‘Renaissance of Idealism’ (1896) as the inevitable reaction to a brand of naturalism that was rooted in positivist thought, and with which a generation, he declared, had become disillusioned.

That the spiritual revival at the fin de siècle—in the various forms of neo-Catholicism, mysticism and occultism—went hand in hand with a ‘reaction’ against the materialist principles of naturalist fiction is well established.[[81]](#endnote-81) What has gone largely unremarked, though, is how aesthetic disputes were harnessed to the ends of Catholic critiques of Zola’s intervention in matters of religious doctrine and practice in the wake of *Lourdes*—and not just as a further set of familiar objections against the novelist’s vulgar naturalist style, but often as a more subtle deconstruction of his own literary techniques. Above all, claims that Zola’s naturalist fiction repeatedly broke its own laws of mimesis were exploited by Catholic detractors, who found in literary debates further ammunition for their own accusations. Take Lasserre’s response to Zola’s defence of his novel, in which the latter denied any injurious intent, claiming instead to have cast Bernadette, ‘who was in reality only a poor simpleton’, in an idealised light:[[82]](#endnote-82)

Shall I be so cruel as to point out to M. Zola that it is rather surprising to see him confess to having flouted not only the universal laws of truthfulness that govern history, but the particular rule of Realism, of which he is the pontiff, and which dictates that one reject the *ideal* and paint things only as they *really* are.[[83]](#endnote-83)

Zola’s concession to Catholic sensitivities was thus reframed by Lasserre as a betrayal of the very aesthetic system he preached: what business could the arch anti-idealist have with the language and processes of his adversaries? Such inconsistencies offered further proof, if any were needed, of the writer’s readiness to go against his word.

It says much for the ongoing relevance of aesthetics to ideological debates that this interrogation of Zola’s literary convictions came to underpin scepticism of, and hostility towards, the writer’s intervention in the Dreyfus case.[[84]](#endnote-84) As Zola’s trial progressed, one reporter mused about the kind of mental turmoil this ‘man of the document’ must have undergone in order to have misjudged such a complex affair: ‘Only a short while ago, when he was battling in the name of experimental science, documentary investigations, analysis and truth, M. Zola would, upon hearing these obscure claims [over proofs yet to be exposed], have smirked in disdain’.[[85]](#endnote-85) On this reading, the novelist’s sibylline insistence on the eventual disclosure of exculpatory evidence only contradicted his naturalist credentials. Others, meanwhile, returned to familiar critiques of Zola’s distorted vision as a novelist to discredit his version of events. The day after Zola had been convicted of libel for his allegations against the military, Ernest Judet, editor-in-chief of the anti-Dreyfusard *Petit Journal*, declared that Zola had mistakenly applied the aesthetic procedures of his fiction to real life. In an article headed ‘The Branding of Judas’, Judet derided the novelist’s tendency to distortion—his ‘taste for magnifying ten-fold that deceives him in art, and which leads him to confuse mice with elephants’.[[86]](#endnote-86)

It was on such grounds that Zola’s literary style could be held to explain the novelist’s ‘misreading’ of the judicial case. And in the Catholic anti-Dreyfusard imagination, these objections were closely tied to a narrative of just retribution. Take, as one salient example, the article that *La Croix* placed alongside its report on the conclusion of Zola’s trial, entitled ‘Idealism of Realists’. Naturally jubilant in tone, the author described the guilty verdict as expiation for Zola’s trespasses against the Catholic faith―and, far more curiously, for the writer’s embrace of a delusional kind of idealism:

Zola will have amply paid off his satanic debt to falsehood, ugliness and corruption. This chronicler of repugnant scenes has been an enemy of religion at the same time as he has fermented moral ills. […] The realist writer is dying; he is sinking and falling apart, because he has lost, through his own complacency, a feeling for the reality of things, because this enemy of idealism has carved out an *ideal* for himself, an ideal of power and glory. He believed himself the arbiter of legal questions. […] For somebody who loves the real, he certainly had his head in the clouds.[[87]](#endnote-87)

What precedes this diagnosis of Zola’s downfall is an account of the writer’s aesthetic that had, by the late 1890s, become entirely commonplace: the charges Zola had levelled at idealist authors, it was repeated, could easily be turned back on the naturalist himself. Those writers ‘who write only with an ideal in mind’, instead of ‘copying [characters] faithfully from flesh-and-blood models’, had long been the object of Zola’s scorn. And yet, despite its pretentions, Zola’s realism was in fact aligned with the same anti-mimetic aesthetic of those ‘poor ideal chasers’―the only difference being that Zola, pathologically obsessed by the indecent, insalubrious and vulgar, was ‘the *idealist of ugliness*’ rather than the ‘*idealist of beauty*’. Such pontification was obviously indebted to critics such as Brunetière, Lemaître and Remy de Gourmont, who had long described Zolian naturalism as a reverse idealism, or *idéalisme à rebours*, hyperbolically exaggerating the sordid and repugnant.[[88]](#endnote-88) But with the conclusion of Zola’s trial, these terms could be put to new rhetorical ends. Indeed, what masquerades here as literary criticism is clumsily tacked onto biography: Zola’s advocacy of Dreyfus’ case has been driven by his perpetual failure to grasp the real, leaving him—in a delicious irony—the victim of his own misplaced, and misdirected, idealism.

III

On the evening of 18 July 1898, Zola fled Paris for London following the failure of his appeal against the verdict on his trial for defamation: sentenced to a year in prison, he would spend the next eleven months in hiding, only returning home once Dreyfus’ retrial was secured. That August, during the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes, a local newspaper printed a dispatch from Paris, which was in turn taken up by *La Croix*: Zola was reported to be on the move, and travelling alone and *in cognito* to Lourdes.[[89]](#endnote-89) Were this to be true, the report went on, the pilgrims would undoubtedly greet him in a spirit of forgiveness... It is a sign of the ways in which the two episodes were inextricably linked in the Catholic imagination that Zola could be envisioned, in the wake of the guilty verdict, returning to the scene of his former crime. Such knowingly ‘fake news’ displayed, of course, a wanton sensationalism, which was intended to keep alive the connection in readers’ minds between the writer’s respective betrayals of Church and Army. The Dreyfus Affair galvanised, as we have seen, longstanding resentments among Catholics that were indelibly tied to his fiction of the Lourdes shrine, the claims and blasphemous insinuations of which were recast in the light of Zola’s championing of the Jewish officer as part of a new eschatological narrative.

Zola’s own reflections on the imbrication of religious and military institutions during the Affair are played out in his last novel *Vérité* (1903), which had only just begun to be serialised in *L’Aurore* at the time of his death.[[90]](#endnote-90) Here, Zola transposed key elements of the Affair, while putting the Church, rather than the military, centre-stage. His is the story of the persecution of a Jewish schoolteacher following his wrongful conviction for the rape and murder of his nephew―the real culprit being a man of the cloth. The Catholic church becomes embroiled in a cover-up, peddling perfidious hypotheses about the accused, and whipping up anti-Semitic feeling, via the press: the local newspaper of Zola’s fictional town, *La Croix de Beaumont*, a transparent calque of the Assumptionist daily. In one sense, then, Zola was returning to his attack on the Catholic church’s promotion of anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair as a desperate means of bringing citizens back to the altar.[[91]](#endnote-91) But the novel is also shot through with echoes of Lourdes, in particular. For the forces of rationalism, embodied by Zola’s right-thinking hero, must contend with the exploits of a powerful Catholic congregation, whose worship of Saint Antoine de Padoue generates a commercial success, the resemblances of which to the Pyrenean shrine are barely disguised: ‘The Saint was enthroned upon a golden altar, which was permanently covered in flowers and glittering in candlelight, […] and a sales office was set up in the vestry, where customers queued from morning ’til night.’[[92]](#endnote-92) Here, the promise of the miracle cure is shamelessly extended to all kinds of material wishes, as clerics exploit the credulity and base instincts of worshipers in return for financial gain. Where between *Lourdes* and *Vérité* the Dreyfus Affair had intervened, one of its effects was to eliminate any ambiguities from Zola’s indictment of the Catholic church, the worst excesses of which he displays in his last work of fiction with hyperbolic clarity.

In these respects, *Vérité* was a vehicle for anti-clerical convictions that had been sharpened by the Dreyfus Affair, and which spoke to the wider secularising agendas of the Third Republic that culminated, two years later, in the law on the separation of Church and state. Such convictions were also emboldened no doubt, by the discursive struggle that Zola’s *Lourdes* had instigated. In ways that prefigured the Affair to come, the Lourdes debates not only polarised protagonists, but each intervention served to further concretise the shared convictions of its own community of readers, cultivated by a press that assiduously tracked, even depended on, the movements of its enemies. The Catholic ‘reaction’ to Zola’s portrayal of the shrine―its miracle cures, and its origins―offered up critiques of the author’s intervention that were ready to be exploited by those who recognised in the Dreyfusard the same capacity for betrayal. While the Catholic right hitched itself to the nationalist and militaristic agendas of the anti-Dreyfusard cause, it continued to find in the author of *Lourdes* its arch anti-hero. If the legacy of the one affair for the other deserves to be better understood, however, it is not simply for what it can tell us about those ideological resentments that were rehearsed across scandals, latently or unequivocally, by Zola’s enemies. Close reading of the discourse in which Catholic refutations of Zola’s novel were couched allows us to determine the specific suspicions about his role as ‘intellectual’ that were forged in the crucible of his intervention on Lourdes. It also reveals the obsessive quarrel over aesthetics that underpinned their assault on the writer’s version of events—and it is precisely this, I have argued, that would frame an affair built on strikingly cognate questions of veracity, proofs, documents, evidence and imagination. These texts’ glaring repudiation, and disputation, of Zola’s naturalist credo is unsurprising. Far more telling is their attempts to convince readers of the novelist’s ‘bad faith’, guilty of the same indulgences—naivety, conjecture, fantasy—with which he charged his adversaries. The writer’s moral treachery was, ultimately, best figured as a betrayal of his own aesthetic principles. Such rhetoric found its ideal outlet in the Dreyfus Affair, where the struggle over rival versions of the truth often hinged on the promotion of aesthetic differences. In each case, the intricate manoeuvres of literary criticism married with ideological disputes, as questions of style and method spilled over into the workings of political history.

1. ‘Le M.’, ‘Je suis l’Immaculée Conception’, *La Croix*, 12 February 1898. Ruth Harris draws attention to this article in ‘The Assumptionists and the Dreyfus Affair’, *Past & Present*, 194 (2007), 175–211 (188), and alludes to the newspaper’s reading of the trial’s timing in *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York, 2010), 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. P. Pierrard, *Les Chrétiens et l’affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, 1998), 93. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The novel began to appear in serial form in *Gil Blas* on 14 April 1894 and ran until 14 August. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Harris, ‘The Assumptionists and the Dreyfus Affair’, 181. *La Croix* first appeared in April 1880 as a ‘revue’, and after a brief disappearance, returned as a daily in June 1883. According to Pierre Sorlin, the newspaper regularly sold 130,000 copies at the end of 1889; and its reach was extended by several regional editions. *‘La Croix’ et les juifs (1880–1899). Contribution à l’histoire de l’antisémitisme contemporaine* (Paris, 1967), 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. P. L’Ermite, ‘Étripez-le!’, *La Croix*, 13 and 14 February 1898. L’Ermite refers here to the depositions of General Pellieux and M. Gribelin, who were military witnesses. Predictably, he omits to register the testimony of Picquart on the same day, who described the proofs that pointed towards Major Esterhazy’s guilt. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Another recurring cause of resentment was Zola’s choice of nickname for the alcoholic eldest son of Père Fouan in *La Terre* (1887): Jésus-Christ. For references to the latter in this period, see L. Colin, *Ce que pense Henri Lasserre du roman d’Émile Zola* (Paris, [1894]), 17; and ‘Feu ouvert’, *La Croix*, 8 February 1898. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. On the origins and evolution of the pilgrimage, see R. Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London, 1999), 258–87. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. A. Pagès, *Émile Zola, un intellectuel dans l’Affaire Dreyfus: Histoire de ‘J’accuse’* (Paris, 1991), 289, fn 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *Le Procès Zola devant la Cour d’Assises de la Seine et la Cour de Cassation (7 février*–*23 février—31 mars*–*2 avril 1898): compte-rendu sténographique ‘in-extenso’ et documents annexes* (Paris, 1898), 396. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Harris, *Lourdes*, 338–9. S. K. Kaufman also touches on the parallels between the Dreyfus Affair and the Lourdes debates—their ‘common actors and an overlapping context’, and especially the key role of publicity and the mass press in both controversies. *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca, 2005), 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Harris, ‘Preface’, *Dreyfus*, xxv. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Harris discusses the response of the Director of the Medical Bureau at the shrine, Gustave Boissarie, and alludes to Henri Lasserre’s refutation of Zola’s novel, but does not touch on the other reactions we shall examine here. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *Le Roman expérimental*, ed. F.-M. Mourad (Paris, 2006), 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of Manhood* (Baltimore, 2004), 177. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, ed. N. L. Kleeblatt (Berkeley, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. On *L’Argent*: ‘Les Juifs dépeints par M. Zola’, *La Croix*, 20 and 21 February 1898. *La Croix* frequently invoked Zola’s war novel as evidence of his complicity with the Prussians. During his trial, on 14 January 1898, one commentator remarked upon the following irony: ‘M. Zola who, in his book *La Débâcle*, dragged our captive soldiers through the mud, now declares himself to be the supreme judge of the army’s honour’ (2). More widely, a number of caricatures played on these associations. For example, ‘As-tu vu Zola?’ showed the author fleeing the country for Berlin, a copy of *La Débâcle* under his arm: <http://www.collections.musee-bretagne.fr/ark:/83011/FLMjo168238>. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. *Les Antinaturalismes fin-de-siècle de Barbey à Barrès (1877–1908). Exploration d’un labyrinthe critique, sociologique, philosophique, esthétique et moral*. Thèse de doctorat: Sorbonne Paris Cité (2018), 374. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *Dreyfus*, 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. ‘Champ littéraire et champ du pouvoir: les écrivains de l’Affaire Dreyfus’, *Annales*, 32 (1977), 240-64. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of Intellectuals* (New York, 1999), 17-64 (40). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of Manhood*, 176-202. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Letter from Alexandrine Zola to Elina Laborde, 26 August 1894. B[ibliothèque] n[ationale] de F[rance], NAF 28522 (2), fo. 153. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Discussions of the debates surrounding the novel include: M. Lapière, *Le Langage des sources dans ‘Les Trois Villes’ d’Émile Zola: la dialectique de la foi et de la raison* (Paris, 2018), 153–84; Kaufman, *Consuming Visions*, 114–18, 169–174; Harris, *Lourdes*, 338–42. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. See S. Disegni, ‘Zola mis à l’Index’, in *Zola au Panthéon: l’épilogue de l’affaire Dreyfus*, ed. A. Pagès (Paris, 2010), 159–72. Zola gave an interview on the subject in *Le Matin*, 22 September 1894, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. On Moncoq’s response, Hamon, *Les Antinaturalismes fin-de-siècle*, 197–200. Listed here are some of the works which responded directly to Zola’s novel. But there was a veritable frenzy of writing on Lourdes in the early 1890s, much of which was linked to Zola’s interest in the shrine, even if no reference to the novel was made. B. Marquer provides a wider overview of the novel’s reception, and ensuing arguments over the novel’s claims, in his Introduction to the Garnier edition of Zola’s *Lourdes* (Paris, 2015), 9–42. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Moncoq, for instance, appears on the list of members of the nationalist and anti-Dreyfusard Ligue de la Patrie Française, which was published in *Le Gaulois* on 20 January 1899. Hamon, *Les Antinaturalismes fin-de-siècle*, 199. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Drumont collaborated in the 1860s on *Le Contemporain* while Lasserre was chief editor. See É. Laubarède, *Henri Lasserre: l’écrivain, l’œuvre* (Paris, 1901), 47, 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. L. Colin, *Henri Lasserre: sa vie, sa mission, ses lettres, papiers et documents inédits*, 2nd edition (Paris, 1901), 350–53. Elsewhere, Drumont attacked those who cast doubts over the apparitions at Lourdes as unpatriotic. Unsurprisingly, he attributed such scepticism to the Jew, for whom ‘the holy Virgin is an abomination, just as much as her divine son’. *La France juive: essai d’histoire contemporaine*, 2 vols (Paris, 1886), 2, 465. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Poncelet notes the divisive nature of L’Ermite’s discourse among Catholics. His article ‘Flay him alive!’ invited the complaint of one Parisian chaplain, who declared: ‘Pierre L’Ermite [is] a kid from Paris with the gift of the gab, but has overstepped the mark’ (*Pierre L’Ermite*, 170). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. E. Cahm estimates that *La Croix* was ‘read by 20,000 priests, more than one-third of the parish clergy’. *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London and New York, 1996), 90. For the newspaper’s declaration, ‘*La Croix* et les Juifs’, *La Croix*, 30 August 1890, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Of these, 116 priests signed their name, and over 200 remained anonymous. P. Quillard, *Le Monument Henry: liste des souscripteurs classés méthodiquement et selon l’ordre alphabétique* (Paris, 1899). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Harris, *Dreyfus*, 172; Kaufman, *Consuming Visions*, 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. The pilgrimage fell under Père François Picard’s leadership from 1880. See Chapter 7 of Harris’ *Lourdes* for an account of the pilgrimage’s foundations. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Harris, ‘The Assumptionists and the Dreyfus Affair’, 181. For more on Bailly, see J. Lebrun, ‘Le Père Vincent de Paul, le cavalier dans l’impasse ou à l’enseigne du soldat-laboureur’, in *Cent ans d’histoire de ‘La Croix’*, ed. R. Rémond and É. Poulat (Paris, 1988), 37–44. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Kaufman, *Consuming Visions*, 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. ‘Une brûlure occasionnée par le livre de N.-D. de Lourdes par Zola’, *La Croix*, 30 November 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. The following indictment is emblematic: ‘The Assumption Fathers had only seen the success of their pilgrimages grow year on year because they sold […] consolation and lies, that delicious bread of hope for which a suffering humanity has an insatiable appetite’. Zola, *Lourdes*, 112. Abbé Joseph Crestey defends the Fathers against such accusations in his *Le Lourdes de Zola* (Paris, 1894), 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Y. Poncelet, *Pierre L’Ermite (1863–1959): Prêtre journaliste à ‘La Croix’ et romancier. Présence catholique à la culture de masse* (Paris, 2011), 166–73. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. E. Duplessy, ‘Pierre L’Ermite’, *La Croix*, 27–28 July 1913, 1. See *Pierre l’Ermite: apologiste de belle humeur* (Paris, 1938), and his refutation of Zola’s novel, *Zola et Lourdes. I. Le Miracle et M. Zola. II. La Liturgie et M. Zola. III. Le Sacerdoce et M. Zola* (Paris, 1895). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. M. Kubler, ‘Nos frères aînés’, *La Croix*, 11 and 12 January 1998. Available online: <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Ce-jour-la/12-janvier-1998-cent-ans-lAffaire-Dreyfus-repentance-Croix-2018-01-12-1200905438>. M. Winock discusses the newspaper’s anti-Semitic campaign in *Décadence fin de siècle* (Paris, 2017), 97–100. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. ‘Mon Voyage à Lourdes’, reproduced in Zola, *Lourdes*, 575–644 (611). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Harris, *Lourdes*, 339–42, and Kaufman, *Consuming Visions*, 114–18. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *La Croix*, 25–26 November 1894, 1–2. Poncelet also points to L’Ermite’s ‘Une séance de constatation à Lourdes’ in his collection of stories, *Lisez-moi ça!* (1894). Here, he described Zola’s presence at the consultations: ‘[he] bites the tip of his glove, which, for him, is a sign of great mental strain’ (*Pierre L’Ermite*, 166). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. L’Ermite, ‘Pourquoi cette brochure?’, *Boissarie, Zola. Conférence du Luxembourg* (Paris, 1895), viii. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. *Boissarie, Zola*, v (original emphasis). Zola described Balzac as a naturalist precisely because he was ‘an observer, […] an investigator, who called himself a doctor in social science’. ‘Le Naturalisme’, in *Une campagne*, Œuvres Complètes, vol. 14 (Paris, 1970), 509. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Abbé J. Crestey, *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Dr D. Moncoq, *Réponse complète au ‘Lourdes’ de M. Zola* (Caen, 1894), 48. Moncoq was made Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur in 1874, and was a pioneer of the blood transfusion. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. M. Barrès, ‘La Protestation des intellectuels!’, *Le Journal*, 1 February 1898, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. *Après le procès. Réponse à quelques ‘intellectuels’* (Paris, 1898), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Upon the verdict of Zola’s trial, on 24 February 1898, Maurice Barrès set the tone in declaring the novelist’s actions as ‘regrettable evidence of a desire, more passionate than enlightened, to enhance his reputation’. ‘Impressions d’audience’, *Le Figaro*, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Crestey, *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 94. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Moncoq, *Réponse complète*, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. ‘M. Émile Zola et M. Henri Lasserre’, *L’Écho de Paris*, 2 October 1894, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. G. Méry, ‘Huysmans et Zola’, *La Libre parole*, 4 February 1898; cited in J.-M. Seillan, ‘Huysmans, un antisémite fin-de-siècle’, *Romantisme*, 95 (1997), 113–26 (117). [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. *La Croix*, 13 and 14 February 1898, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Quoted by Boissarie, *Lourdes. Depuis 1858 jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris, 1894), 58. ‘The name of this Virgin’, Boissarie argued, ‘the words she uttered, everything is inconsistent with what the subject could understand’ (14). The Catholic doctor Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre advanced the same thesis in his *La Stigmatisation, l’extase divine et les miracles de Lourdes: réponse aux libres-penseurs* (Clermont-Ferrand; Paris, 1894): ‘The child could not have imagined this formulation; her ignorance, her confessions are authentic. How could she have reproduced through hallucination what did not otherwise exist in her mind and her memories? She could not have put this proclamation of lofty dogma into the Apparition’s mouth no more than the other words spoken’ (2, 350). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. #### In ‘Mon Voyage à Lourdes’, Zola noted: ‘It was usual to read among families each evening. […] And not just the bible, but the story of The Four Sons of Aymon and other knightly tales, stories of witches and fairies.’ Lourdes, 617.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Mélanie Calvet and Maximin Giraud claimed to have been visited by the Virgin while they tended livestock on the outskirts of their Alpine commune in September 1846. Zola gives a précis of his conversation with Barbet in his notes: ‘This priest knew all about the little shepherds of La Salette, whom he called by their names, and they came to mind when he beheld Bernadette (see Barbet’s account in his guide).’ ‘Mon Voyage à Lourdes’, *Lourdes*, 617. Zola reproduces Barbet’s transcription of Ader’s words in the text of his novel (*Lourdes*, 121), and discusses the source in ‘Lourdes’, *Le Figaro*, 31 August 1894, 1. On Zola’s reconstruction of Bernadette’s childhood: R. Ternois, *Zola et son temps: Lourdes–Rome–Paris* (Paris, 1961), 218–28. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. *Lourdes*, 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Zola, ‘Lourdes’, *Le Figaro*, 31 August 1894, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Ricard, *La Vraie Bernadette de Lourdes*, 20–21. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Beleau had written to Zola directly on 29 September 1894. On the role of the public wager in debates over Lourdes, Kaufman, *Consuming Visions*, 162–93. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. *Les Lettres de Henri Lasserre*, 113–14. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Beleau followed up on his challenge in an open letter to Zola, printed in *La Croix* on 18 October 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Szabo continues, ‘the exchanges bear more than a superficial resemblance to the contemporary press wars of the Dreyfus Affair’. ‘Seeing is Believing? The Form and Substance of French Medical Debates over Lourdes’, *B. of the Hist. of Medicine*, 76 (2002), 199–230 (202). Zola was in fact taken to court for defamation in the wake of *Lourdes*, not for reasons hitherto discussed, but by the businessman Henri Bourgeois. Bourgeois contested Zola’s insinuations that he had conspired with the Pères de la Grotte to undermine the Church building project he directed, and which had been commissioned by Lourdes clergyman, Abbé Peyramale. Bourgeois made it known that he would be taking Zola to court in *Le Journal*, on 14 October 1894. The hearing eventually took place on 20 February 1895, and Zola was acquitted on 6 March. Zola, *Correspondance*, vol. 8, ed. O. Morgan, D. E. Speirs and J. Walker (Montreal; Paris, 1991), 170–71, 207–08; and Henri Mitterand, *Zola, III: L’honneur (1893*–*1902)* (Paris, 2002), 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. *Les Lettres de Henri Lasserre*, 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. *La Croix*, 22 February 1898, 2. Take also the commentary of the anti-Dreyfusard (and anti-clerical) Henri Rochefort: ‘with what right does [Zola] claim that [Dreyfus] is innocent, when he has not studied, nor even seen, the dossier of the condemned, who has been declared guilty by all of his judges?’ ‘La Parole de Zola’, *L’Intransigeant*, 24 February 1898, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. *Les Lettres de Henri Lasserre*, 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. *Lourdes*, 99, 167. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Moncoq, *Réponse complète*, 30; Crestey, *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Zola, *L’Affaire Dreyfus. La Vérité en marche*, ed. J.-D. Bredin (Paris, 1992), 114, 152, 87–88. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Zola, ‘Lettre à la France’, *L’Affaire Dreyfus*, 79–89 (82). [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. *La Vraie Bernadette*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Zola’s detractors frequently lamented his failure to recognise the plethora of proofs placed before him. This accusation in Moncoq’s *Réponse complète* is emblematic: ‘He denied facts that were as plain as day, facts that were placed before his eyes’ (46). [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. *Le Lourdes de Zola*, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Bloy’s invective appeared in the *Mercure de France* in September 1894, and was reprinted as part of his *Je m’accuse* of 1900, a response to Zola’s 1898 open letter ‘J’accuse..!’ See also J. Lemaître, ‘Émile Zola’, *Les Contemporains: études et portraits littéraires* (Paris, 1886), 249–284, and Hamon, *Les Antinaturalismes fin-de-siècle*. Both Brunetière and Lemaître joined the anti-Dreyfusard cause. Lemaître conducted a nationalist campaign in *L’Écho de Paris* and served as president of the nationalist Ligue de la Patrie Française until 1904. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. ‘La banqueroute du naturalisme’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 83:1 (1887), 213–224 (216, 215). [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. *Connaissez-vous Brunetière? Enquête sur un antidreyfusard et ses amis* (Paris, 1997), 125. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. S. Schiano-Bennis, *La Renaissance de l’idéalisme à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. ‘M. Émile Zola et M. Henri Lasserre’, *L’Écho de Paris*, 2 October 1894, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. *Les Lettres de Henri Lasserre*, 80–1 (original emphasis). [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. In his review of Zola’s *Paris* (1898), which was only halfway through its serialisation when ‘J’accuse..!’ appeared, Brunetière took the novelist to task for betraying his prior aesthetic convictions: ‘What is “naturalist”, or “natural” even, about this fanatical, or if you like visionary, style? [...] M. Zola should really reread those pages that he devoted previously to the bankruptcy of romanticism’. Though Brunetière made no reference to the Dreyfus Affair, his disdain for Zola’s hymn to ‘justice’ in the novel is clearly coloured by contemporary events. ‘Le *Paris* de E. Zola’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 146 (1898), 922–34. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. G. Bec (pseudonym of George Bonnamour), ‘Impressions d’audience’, *L’Écho de Paris*, 23 February 1898, 1–2 (2). [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. *Le Petit Journal*, 24 February 1898, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. ‘Idéalisme des réalistes’, *La Croix*, 24 February 1898, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. The term is used by F. Brunetière in ‘L’Idéalisme dans le roman’, *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1 May 1885, 215–225. See also R. de Gourmont, ‘Le Naturalisme’, *Le Contemporain*, April 1882: ‘Idealists do not have a greater imagination than naturalists: but instead of employing the imagination in the sole quest for ugliness [...], they use it to pursue eternal beauty’. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. *La Croix*, 21 and 22 August 1898, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. *Vérité* was serialised between 10 September 1902 and 15 February 1903. Zola died, in suspicious circumstances, on 29 September 1902. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Take Zola’s ‘Lettre à la France’: ‘Catholicism tried in vain to influence the people, by creating workers’ circles, expanding its pilgrimages, but failed in […] bringing them back to the altar. […] [C]hurches remained empty, the people no longer believed. And now circumstances have allowed the people to be aroused by anti-Semitic hatred and poisoned by this kind of fanaticism.’ *L’Affaire Dreyfus*, 85. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. *Vérité* (Paris, 1993), 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)