

The revival of French operatic theatre Emile Zola – Alfred Bruneau

Comparing Zola to music throws up many surprises. While the writer strove against the approved academic forms of painting for the recognition of impressionist painting, and while he advocated a novel theory of writing which was a complete break from romanticism, he remains strangely absent from the upheavals taking place in the French music at the time.

1863 is an important year, the start of a post-romantic current in music and literature. Delacroix and Vigny die while Berlioz writes his last work *The Trojans*. After the defeat of 1870, and in reaction to Germany, the tendency is to favour French art. The National Society for Music, established in 1871 by Camille Saint-Saëns, has the motto *Ars Gallica* and is dedicated to making new French masters better known. This period also sees the success of music in the theatre, notable with 1875 with the echoing bomb in Bizet's *Carmen* which places the orchestra and the choir at the heart of the action with a constant attention to realism in the action and the music.

This is also the period during the 1880s in which Massenet staged a large number of operatic works such as *Hérodiade* (1881), *Manon* (1884), and *Thaïs* (1894). As Frédéric Robert insists, Massenet 'achieves an interesting – and interested – compromise between Gounod and Wagner'¹.

In this proliferation of musical creativity Zola remains in the background. Only just does he go and applaud Wagner in Paris in an anti-conformist thrust which characterises his youth. On February 9 1868 he writes, in a letter to Marius Roux: 'Great success of Wagner's religious March, three rounds of applause. This march, taken from *Lohengrin*, which was being played for the first time was even encored! This has never happened, I believe, not for any piece by the great musician [...] I was one of the first to shout encore!²' Thus faced with the Wagnerian tide, Zola in fact expresses very little. Henri Mitterand sees several reasons for this: 'After 1870, Zola will have even more reason to remain silent about his Wagnerism [...]: the collective dream of revenge on Germany censures all public expression of admiration for the author of the *Phantom Ship*, and while Wagner will be given second grace, it will mainly be within symbolist circles, readers and editors of the *Wagnerian Review* to which Zola gives only sceptical attention, swept up as he is in the – albeit sometimes Wagnerian – progress of *Germinal* and *The Soil*³.

In a general sense, Zola professes a profound contempt for music. In *Naturalism in the theatre* he reproaches music of being purely sensual with no intellectual dimension. Music thus, does not enable the reflection necessary to the building of a critical sensibility. Offenbach, Rossini, and Meybeer are

¹ *La Musique française au XIXe siècle*, Frédéric Robert, Paris, P.U.F., Que sais-je ?, 1963.

² Emile Zola à Marius Roux, lettre du 9 février 1868, *Correspondance, II*, p. 114, Université de Montréal et C.N.R.S., édition établie sous la direction de B.H. Bakker, 1978-1995.

³ *Zola*, Henri Mitterand, Paris, Fayard, 1999-2002, Tome I, p. 612.

particularly in the firing line here. On June 6 1891, Zola attempts to explain his attitude towards music:

Like all, or almost all, novelist, I **put up with (?)** music. But now, it gets everywhere. I have to admit it. In the eighteenth century, we had an extremely limpid language; romanticism came and brought painting into the world of letters, we were writing painted sentences. Today, the younger school is putting music into literature sentences must be musical. So be it. Forward, then, with music⁴.

Zola often turned away from music. But that was a writer's position. An in-depth study of Zola's work would show all the allusions to music which appear in it, all the musical sides of Zolian writing. One only needs to think of the symphony of cheeses in *The Bowels of Paris* or of the death of Albine in *Father Mouret's Sin*:

She listened to the perfumes which whispered in her buzzing head. They played a strange music of scents which were slowly, gently putting her to sleep, first, it was a gay, childish prelude: its hands which had wrung odorous greenery exhaled the bitterness of trodden grasses told her of its childish runs through the Paradou's wildernesses. Then, the song of a flute could be heard⁵...

HAN, THIS WAS A BIT OF A NIGHTMARE – CAN YOU GET AN ENGLISH VERSION OF THE TEXT AND USE THAT?

Zola, not a musician? Even he can no longer claim this when in March of 1888 he meets a young composer by the name of Alfred Bruneau.

When one asks musicians who Alfred Bruneau is, they are, often unable to answer. Nevertheless, his work deserves to be rediscovered as does his connection with Zola and his life at the heart of the political and artistic circles of his time.

Alfred Bruneau was born in Paris on March 3 1857. It is during the private recitals given by his parents, who were amateur musicians (his father a violinist, his mother a pianist), that the young boy begins to be interested in music. We find him, a few years later in César Franck's organ class at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, in Franck's cello class, and finally in Massenet's composition class. A caricature in the review 'Accords perdus' shows César Franck's class with Alfred Bruneau in the middle surrounded by students whose names are given as Emmanuel Chabrier, Vincent d'Indy, André Messager, and Ernest Chausson.

It was in March 1888 that my friend Frantz Jourdain agreed to introduce me to Emile Zola. I had not idea at the time of the extraordinary

⁴ Emile Zola, Interview accordée à *L'Eclair*, 6 juin 1891.

⁵ Emile Zola, *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret, Oeuvres Complètes*, sous la direction de Henri Mitterand, Paris, Cercle du Livre Précieux, Tome 3, p. 261.

consequences that daring visit would have for my life as an artist, indeed as a mere citizen⁶.

This is how Bruneau begins the story of his collaboration with Emile Zola in *In the shade of a big heart* in 1931. At the end of his life, Bruneau is conscious of his youthful daring which led him to meet the grand master of French literature who was at the origin of a revolution in the closed world of operatic music at the end of the nineteenth century. What were the important moments of this revolution? Listening to Bruneau's music we find a writer investing himself in writing operas and a revolutionary young composer in French operatic music. I will also refer to the resonances this revival of operatic music had in England at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Dream is Alfred Bruneau's first opera based on one of Zola's novels. It was staged at the Opéra-Comique on June 18 1891. Bruneau had got the writer's permission to adapt the work for stage on April 1 1888. He had, at first, wanted to put *Father Mouret's Sin* to music, but the book was entrusted to his teacher, Massenet, for that purpose, and he did not want to give it up. Why did Zola put forward this novel, the least naturalist of all the *Rougon-Macquart* series? One has to remember that this novel was written in a very particular context. It follows *The Soil*, a novel which caused lively debate and a strong opposition which took form in the *Manifesto of the Five* (August 8 1887) in which five writers (Paul Bonnetain, Joseph-Henry Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Gustave Guiches, Paul Margueritte) criticise Zola for his pornography and debauchery. Zola was all the more affected by this pamphlet because it seemed remotely controlled by his friend Goncourt. He thus returns to a quieter style of writing. Perhaps it is then that he sees a possibility of rehabilitation thanks to the novel, but also thanks to the resonances it could have on the operatic stage.

Zola, however, does not take part in the writing of the libretto. Too absorbed in his meeting of Jeanne Rozerot and the writing of *The Human Beast*, he agrees with Bruneau to entrust the libretto to Louis Gallet, director of the Lariboisière hospital and famous librettist for Bizet and Massenet. The novelist, nevertheless, is not indifferent to the preparation of the libretto. Bruneau writes that 'the poem of the *Dream*, touched up by Zola, contains many passages written by him. It remains to establish the real level of involvement of the writer in this three-way collaboration.

What is revolutionary about this opera? First of all the action; it does not draw on plots from mythology or French history. The plot of the *Dream*, the love of a young seamstress (Angélique) for the son of a bishop (Félicien), is played out in the present. Even if the set of the opera is a cathedral on which rests an ancient history, the plot is resolutely modern: a story of the love between two people of different social backgrounds. Added to the plot are the costumes which are contemporary city outfits, bought in the Louvre shops and the sets, drawn by Zola himself, which represent realistically a cathedral, a garden, or

⁶ *A l'ombre d'un grand cœur*, Alfred Bruneau, Charpentier, 1931, Slatkine Reprints, 1980, Genève, p. 9.

the inside of the seamstresses' house. Realism is the order of the day notably in the religious scenes.

But the modernity of the work is equally evident in Bruneau's music. The composer uses the *leitmotiv*, a purely Wagnerian characteristic. Certain harmonies are said to be 'cacophonous' such as the bi-tonal passage which describes Monsignor de Hauteceur's anxiety. Bruneau also puts aside the traditional airs (duos, cavatinas) in favour of a continuous melody.

Two phenomena relating to the transition from novel to opera are worth pausing on here. Let us note first of all Angélique's voice which in the novel is a real character trait:

He listened, delighted. He was exhilarated by the softness of her voice which had an extreme charm; and he must have been particularly sensitive to this human music because the caressing inflection, on certain syllables, brought tears to his eyes⁷.

This character trait of Angélique's, which Zola takes up several times in his novel, is logically present in the operatic version, it appears through the soprano score which Bruneau writes for the part.

During the auditions, Zola worried about who would sing the part of Angélique. His work demands that the physical and vocal characteristics of the singer playing the role must be similar to those of an eighteen-year-old girl. He confessed his worry to the composer:

The only point which worries me a little is the difficulty you will have in finding an Angélique, the lack of a suitable artist has sometimes halted a work for years. [...] So find an Angélique quickly⁸.

Bruneau shares Zola's worries on this point and writes to Louis Gallet that they need a 'real artist' to act this role. Indeed, the naturalist aesthetic, still new on the operatic stage, would not recover from the use of an artist who had long lost the freshness of her youth as had often been done in older operatic works.

The second point to notice in listening to the *Dream* is that Bruneau's music, through the use of repeated themes, changes the focus of Zola's novel. This is very well shown in the succession of perfect chords which open the theatrical work. These perfect and massive chords give the work a solid foundation. This strength, which has remained obscured, lightens in the first act during which this succession of chords is repeated to illustrate Hauteceur's motto: 'If God wants it, I want it'⁹.

⁷ Emile Zola, *Le Rêve, Les Rougon-Macquart*, édition établie sous la direction d'Armand Lanoux, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960, Tome 4, p. 869.

⁸ Emile Zola à Alfred Bruneau, lettre du 12 août 1890, *Corr. VII*, p. 77.

⁹ Louis Gallet, *Le Rêve*, drame lyrique, Paris, Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1891, p. 8.

The work it thus placed in the power of God, the characters are not free since their actions depend on a power which is greater than they are. The *Dream* thus becomes a mystical drama while Zola, in his novel, kept to a novelistic representation of human psychology. This is how the status of a work can change in the transition from novel to opera.

In this game of writing an opera, Zola allowed himself to be had. I will not spend long on the second opera which Bruneau based on one of Zola's works, *The Attack on the Windmill*, but I would like to point out what appears to be Zola's first real contribution to the writing of a libretto. As part of this opera, staged at the Opéra-Comique on November 23 1893, Zola wrote a text known as *Adieux to the Forest*. During the 1870 war, Dominique, who has refused to help the enemy, is locked in his fiancée's father's windmill. He is awaiting his coming execution. In act II scene 5 Dominique, who knows that he is condemned, says his goodbyes. In these verses, Zola follows the rules of the alexandrine, the form chosen by Gallet for the whole of the libretto. He follows the alternating rhyme scheme and alternates feminine and masculine rhymes.

Particularly noteworthy is the rhythm, which Zola brings to these few verses. The fresh librettist chooses a heavy rhythm for this lamenting and nostalgic scene, which Bruneau puts into music by using a palette of low-sounding instruments and he uses the sections of the orchestra at their lowest register. Zola, always careful with the rhythm, adopts a more military tempo in the third stanza to illustrate Dominique's determination to die. One witnesses a heroisation of the character which Bruneau further underlines with an accelerated tempo on the ninth verse (which Zola had wanted more staccato), only to then enlarge and weigh down the tempo in verse ten. Thus an effect of dramatic climax is created.

This remarkably forceful lament can be compared to the German *lied*. This comparison is further underlined by the fact that the libretto contains a *lied* sung by a German watchman. The *lied* has stanzas which have an identical structure. The *Adieux* conform to the type of stanzaic *lieder* which marry together the rhythm of the verses and the general structure of the stanzas, while conveying the overall tone of the text without taking into account the changes in atmosphere of particular stanzas. And, Bruneau respects to the letter, the tone and the rhythm which Zola wrote into the text. Finally the comparison with the Schubertian *lied* is not accidental as Schubert's own *lieder* focused repeatedly on the linked themes of nature, love and death. These three themes are clearly intertwined in the *Adieux* where the exaltation of nature accompanies the lovers and softens the death of one of them.

Another important date in the revival of opera in France is the staging of *Messidor* on February 9 1897 at the Palais Garnier. This work is particularly interesting as much for its plot as for its developed musical themes and for the questions it raises. The plot is summarised by Zola in *Le Figaro* on February 17 while the music is explained by Bruneau. The play tells of the misery of the peasants, the old gold diggers in the mountains of Arriège. The peasants,

including William and his mother Véronique, are reduced to cultivating the soil which has been drained by Gaspard, who has built a factory which siphons off mountain water in order to extract gold from it. William is in love with Hélène, Gaspard's daughter. But Véronique tells William that Gaspard killed his father and that the union cannot be. From the city arrives Mathias, William's cousin, who calls for a revolt and wants to destroy Gaspard's factory. Véronique then tells the legend of Gold which says that there is a cave in the mountain in which 'the Child Jesus, sitting on his mother's lap, for ever takes fistfuls of sand from the source, which forever falls from his little hands as a rain of gold; and that if any living person should discover the secret entrance and enter the golden cathedral, the whole place would crumble, and the gold would disappear for ever.' The drama ends with the annihilation of the factory and the return of a fertile land. Mathias reveals himself as **Gaspard's (Ce n'est pas Gaspard mais le père de Guillaume)** killer and throws himself in a ravine. **(THIS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE _ ISN'T GASPARD THE KILLER OF WILLIAM'S FATHER? ISN'T THAT THE IMPEDIMENT TO THE MARRIAGE?)** Thus the ancient conflict is resolved and the marriage between Hélène and William becomes possible.

The most salient innovation in *Messidor* is evident in its prose. Indeed, verse was *de rigueur* in operatic works not least those stages at the Opéra. Attempts have already been made to introduce prose to the opera – Gounod had had to abandon his attempt to put Molière's prose text *Georges Dandin* to music. Massenet took up the baton from Gounod with *Thaïs* in 1894. Louis Gallet had adapted the libretto from the novel by Anatole France; this was the first libretto written in free verse. Louis Gallet had certainly been influenced by Bruneau's ideas on the matter of moving away from traditional versification. *Messidor* is thus the first operatic work written in prose; it was before *Fervaal* by Vincent d'Indy (written in 1895 but produced after *Messidor*), before *Louise* by Gustave Charpentier, and before Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande*. It is clear that Zola and Bruneau were making new inroads in field of operatic production.

Zola, however, had already asked himself the question of prose long before. In *Naturalism in the Theatre*, he calls for a new kind of theatre:

It is assumed that there is a single style for theatre. [...] I do not deny the brilliance of this language, but I do deny its truth. [...] One day it will become clear that the best style for the theatre is the one which best encompasses the spoken word in conversation, the one which puts the right word in its and gives it its appropriate value. Naturalist novelists have already written excellent exemplary dialogues thus reduced to strictly useful words¹⁰.

Zola thus calls for the use of prose in order to reach a greater truth in the representation of dialogue. The introduction of prose into the operatic gives *Messidor* an undeniably novelistic quality. *Messidor* comes directly from

¹⁰ Emile Zola, *Le Naturalisme au théâtre*, O.C. XI, p. 327.

Zola's novels such as *Germinal*, *The Soil*, and *Work* (the second part of the *Four Gospels*).

On the other hand, Zola was conscious of the mediocrity of his own verse. This meant that if he wanted to write a libretto, he had perforce to do it in prose. And Zola owed this decision to write prose librettos, which revolutionised the world of operatic theatre, to Bruneau.

I have not settled my opinion with regard to the substitution of prose for verse in librettos. [...] It is Bruneau's belief that it is wrong for verse to introduce a particular rhythm in another rhythm. He is more experienced in these matters than I am. He must be right¹¹.

The substitution of prose for verse thus constitutes a real freeing of the dramatic action in Zola and Bruneau's minds.

Messidor is a significant work when placed in the context of the Wagnerian revolution. Bruneau and Zola denied that they were trying to do Wagner in a French context, and they consistently underlined the differences between the two. Nevertheless, *Messidor*'s plot is immediately reminiscent of that of *The Rhine Gold*. This opera by Wagner depicts the struggle for possession of Rhine gold between the daughters of the Rhine, the dwarf Alberich, King of the Nibelungen, Wotan, and the two giants Fafner and Fasolt. The story also tells of a ring made from Rhine gold, which brings back luck to whoever owns it. This evil ring also appears in *Messidor* in the form of a magic necklace belonging to Véronique 'which brings happiness to pure beings, and forces guilty beings to denounce themselves'. *Messidor* finishes with the disappearance of gold from the entire region just as the *Rhine Gold* ends with the whimpering of the daughters of the Rhine crying over the loss of the gold. The similarities between the two operas are, thus, manifold. Nevertheless, important differences also distinguish them from one another. While Wagner places the action in the heart of Nordic mythology, Zola unfolds his plot in the domain of humans, in the poor landscapes of Arrière. It is in this that the Zolian libretto is highly naturalist. Zola's concern is to create a work full of Truth and Humanity. Indeed, Zola will defend the specificity of his work in the face of attacks by hardened Wagnerians. He does this in his letter to Louis de Fourcard, published in *Le Gaulois* on February 23 1897:

Say it, be honest, you don't want me in Parsafal's temple, and you are right. Because I am in favour of the woman who bears child and not in favour of the virgin; because I believe only in health, life, and joy; because I put all my faith in our human toil, in the ancient effort of the people who work the rich land and in the future harvests of joy they will gather from it; because my Latin blood rebels against those perverse Nordic mists and wants only human heroes of light and truth¹².

¹¹ Emile Zola, *Messidor*, in *Le Temps*, 16 février 1897.

¹² Emile Zola, Lettre à Louis de Fourcaud, vers le 21 février 1897, parue dans *Le Gaulois*, 23 février 1897, Corr. VIII, pp. 390-391.

No! The librettist Zola is not Wagnerian. Between the two is an immense ideological and philosophical chasm. This, however, does not prevent Bruneau from using a characteristic element of Wagnerian music: the *leitmotiv*.

The *leitmotiv* is a musical theme which illustrates an aspect of the poem and reappears throughout the work as the action unfolds. In *Messidor*, the *leitmotifs* are numerous. Bruneau points them out in his article 'Music' which appeared opposite Zola's article on the libretto of *Messidor* in *Le Figaro* on February 17 1897. The theme of gold 'which will change its aspect depending on the circumstances and which will be turned around each time bad gold is mentioned', the theme of summer and labour, and the theme of love are all to be found here. The theme of love is very characteristic of the piece. It is heard for the first time in Act I scene four when William offers Hélène a glass of water. The *leitmotiv* is introduced by the *tutti* of horns and then it is taken up by the violins followed by the trombones, which gives the theme a fullness. Then in scene five, after a dramatic rise of the strings towards higher notes and an acceleration of the tempo, the love theme reappears when Véronique reveals to William that his father has been murdered by Gaspard, Hélène's father, and that his marriage to her is impossible. The love theme is at this point misled; it is first played in the background, accompanying a phrase: 'now dare to love the daughter of a murderer!', the strings produce some rapid and high *arpeggios*, then the love theme is confined to the trombones, which in a low register conclude the first act in a menacing tone. That *leitmotiv* returns in the poem with each evocation of the love of the two young people until the final scene which develops this theme into a triumphal hymn while Hélène and William exchange vows of their love. These *leitmotifs* imagined by Bruneau allow his music to illustrate powerfully Zola's poem and fulfil the wishes of the latter for music which accompanies, illustrates, and amplifies what is at stake in the libretto.

It goes without saying that this novelty in French opera struck the Parisian public. At first they were surprised but then became enthusiastic. The press at the time largely echoes the debates which arose in the aftermath of the premieres. Zola, as was his wont, put himself in the spotlight and the articles were often full of praise, but sometimes also fierce. Rather than studying the French reception of the operas of Bruneau and Zola, it was my idea to examine the production of these operas abroad (Belgium, Germany), and particularly in England. I will therefore restrict myself to the production of the *Dream* in London.

When Bruneau arrived in London on October 18 1891, he was disillusioned. The *Dream* had not yet been looked at by the orchestra nor by the choirs of Covent Garden. Harris, the director of Covent Garden, did not seem to be in a hurry to produce the opera. Luckily, the singers were those from the production by the Opéra-Comique. In a letter of October 20 to his wife, Bruneau describes the Ubu-esque way in which the rehearsals started:

Yesterday, when we were discussing today's rehearsals, no one knew where the music was. Finally, after two hours of searching found the

scores under a chair in the caretaker's office and the orchestration in Harris' office. I discussed costumes and sets with Harris who did not know the novel, nor the play, nor the music¹³.

Bruneau therefore had reason to be worried. However, Harris, underneath his apparent incompetence, nevertheless wished to put on the *Dream* with modern costumes and not with medieval costumes, respecting in this the modern bias of the authors of the play.

Once the rehearsals were underway, Bruneau continued to show a profound disappointment in his contacts with the English musicians and public. Nevertheless, behind this irritation we must read a notorious anti-English prejudice in Bruneau which was to dissipate in time, especially when Britain gave Zola a triumphal welcome in September 1893, and again when this same country welcomed the exiled author of *J'Accuse* during the Dreyfus affair. Let us see, however, what Bruneau wrote about this:

Yesterday, we rehearsed the *Dream* for the first time with the orchestra and choir. We begin again today. They read well, but the orchestra only got through two scenes. Jéhin conducted admirably and the first act is much more lively under his hand than at the Opéra-Comique. Only the orchestral elements are mediocre. [...] I am not having any fun and I cannot raise any interest in performances which sin through the under-prepared orchestra by an audience which yesterday evening, did not appear to me to be very intelligent¹⁴.

Bruneau is very critical of England where everything seems bad to him. He even nearly returns to France on October 24 just before the premiere. But he is aware that the stakes are high when a young musician is given the chance to have his work played in England. A lot of money (and Bruneau needed money) and a possible re-staging of his work in Paris after a success in London are at stake. So Bruneau revises his early judgements and eventually doesn't find the English public so stupid after all.

The English public does seem after all less stupid than I had been told. First of all, they never applaud when the orchestra is playing; if, after a sung piece, a single clap is heard, an almighty 'shhhh' sees it off and they wait in and even more vigorous silence for the orchestra to finish the piece. In the *Dream*, we will therefore not have a single sound of approval before the end of the *tableaux*, and this seems very good to me. Also, as soon as the orchestra begins, the auditorium is plunged into a semi-darkness which does not allow the audience any distractions; no one ogles through opera glasses, nor do they talk during the show where everyone is in place on time¹⁵.

¹³ Alfred Bruneau à Philippine Bruneau, lettre inédite du 20 octobre 1891, coll. Puaux-Bruneau.

¹⁴ Alfred Bruneau à Philippine Bruneau, lettre inédite du 22 octobre 1891, coll. Puaux-Bruneau.

¹⁵ Alfred Bruneau à Philippine Bruneau, lettre inédite du 25 octobre 1891, coll. Puaux-Bruneau.

Bruneau thus appreciates English audiences which are much more respectful of the music than French audiences. The opera in London is not a place for showing oneself, a lounge where people talk as it still was in Paris.

Finally, on October 29, the night of the premiere of the *Dream* in London, telegrams arrived in Paris saying “Tremendous success, Kindest Regards, Bruneau¹⁶”. The work was joyfully received by the public. The orchestra surpassed itself and Bruneau even had to admit that there were certain passages which had a ‘vigour one did not recognise’. This success was in no small part thanks to the conductor Léon Jehin who, according to Bruneau, ‘conducts to perfection’. The *Times* critic lauded the singers and musicians, Louis Gallet’s libretto, Léon Jehin’s direction while nevertheless passing harsh judgement on the music itself: ‘It is, by far, the most ugly composition English audiences have ever heard’. He detected in it a strong dramatic emotion, a very particular power: Bruneau would make people talk about him and the musical world would end up giving him their approval.

From that day, and for 40 years, Bruneau will travel ceaselessly in Belgium, in England, in Germany, to Monaco, and in France staging his operas.

I will now draw to a close, I have attempted to highlight aspects of the modernity of the work of Zola and Bruneau. There are many other aspects worthy of study, other works to be discovered. Thousands of newspaper articles were printed about these operas. Debussy, Malher, Verdi, and Strauss stated their admiration for Bruneau’s music. There is therefore much yet to be done today to uncover the uncommon life and music of Alfred Bruneau. It seems that studying the librettos written by Zola also enables a deeper understanding of his work. All this remains to be done.

I would like to conclude simply on the friendship which united Zola and Bruneau. This friendship was never belied. Zola was for Bruneau, at the end of his life, the friend he had had with Cézanne in his youth. This friendship can be read in each one of his letters in which he never fails to thank Zola for having made of him an accomplished composer. I will conclude with what Bruneau wrote to Fernand Desmoulin on September 30 1908, a few words in which Bruneau paints the years since Zola’s death and Grégori’s attempt on Dreyfus’ life during the ceremony in which Zola’s ashes were transferred to the Panthéon, a few words which summarise that beautiful productive friendship:

We went to the Panthéon yesterday to take flowers from the Paradou to our dear grave. It seemed to us that you were there with us and we told you our feelings. I relived, then, in a moment the last six years, the emotional night and tragic day of June 4. Still, we are not as beaten as you say. Zola rests in his glory. The people who pass him in the thousands throw leaves and small daisies through the closed gate as they pass which the caretaker picks up each night and places on the tomb. Not a single disrespectful word has been uttered there for three

¹⁶ Alfred Bruneau à Philippine Bruneau, télégramme du 29 octobre 1891, coll. Puaux-Bruneau.

months. We watched the descent of visitors into the vaults. When the watchman, having named, to the complete indifference of those following him Lazare Carnot, Sadi Carnot, La Tour d'Auvergne, Baudin, Victor Hugo cries: 'Here is the resting place of Emile Zola' the crowd responded: 'Aah!' and rushed forward to see the stone. In the distance, already, we hear the voice calling to memory Mr and Mrs Berthelot. No one moves from the place where Zola is, no one tears themselves away from their contemplation. This stirred my heart¹⁷.

Of this collaboration Zola said: 'Even when we will have won, the future will worry me. It will take a long time for people to forgive us for having been right.' Today, they are forgiven. It remains only for them to be rediscovered.

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¹⁷ Alfred Bruneau à Fernand Desmoulin, lettre inédite du 30 septembre 1908, coll. Puaux-Bruneau.