The Masterpiece Study Guide

The Masterpiece by Émile Zola

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Émile Zola's novel, THE MASTERPIECE, is a semi-autobiographical work telling a story of artistic and political rebellion among a group of aspiring young artists and writers in Paris of the 19th century. Accepted leader of the Bohemian group is the brilliant artist, Claude Lantier, who is haunted by the need to create his masterpiece. He knows what he wants to do but seems forever incapable of accomplishing his goal because of personal insecurities. Falling in love with an innocent young woman, Christine, he begins to live with her and they start out their relationship in blissful romance. Christine is kept hidden from his group of friends who are young men that began their association as school boys in Plassans all now residing in Paris. The artistic abilities of this group include painting, sculpting, architecture, music, and literature. They have a self-avowed rebellion against the Romanticism in art with the aim of producing a new art form of realism for the modern world. As they rage against the status quo, they become known as upstarts who are shunned by the current artistic establishment.

Gradually, the resolve of the group begins to break down as some of them are defeated by their own inadequacies while others, such as Fagerolles and Dubuche are lured into the Society they used to rail against. Their success comes with a high cost after they take the shortcuts to arrive at their desired destinations. The character of Irma Bécot, the common trollop who rises to wealth and notoriety is a parallel to the way Fagerolles and Dubuche prostitute their ideals for success. Sandoz is the only one of the group of friends who finally gets to the top without compromising his convictions. Yet, even with him, success does not hold the satisfaction he assumed it would have. He is the one character who comes to understand the older artist Bongrand who tries to tell the younger artists that the real pleasure is that time spent in reaching for the top rather than being there after a big success. Jory, the journalist, represents a kind of amorality. He actually has no convictions and is content to settle for whatever he can get by putting forth the least amount of effort.

In the end, the friendships deteriorate in the face of repeated failures and wrong choices. Claude never finishes his masterpiece and Christine fights a losing battle with Art, her rival for Claude's affections. Christine is tragic in that she is undone by her deep love for Claude. It takes her some time to recognize her competition for Claude's affections. In her drive to win him back the way they were when they first began their affair, Christine sacrifices her son, Jacques, through neglect. As the initial passion between Claude and Christine unravels, Claude becomes infatuated with the nude woman he attempts to paint but always fails. He has reverted to that point in his life where he worships the painting of a nude Woman, but is indifferent to the body of his wife or a model. Claude slips into madness, only prevented from jumping into the Seine by the call of his Woman in the unfinished canvas that is meant to be his illusive masterpiece. As though bewitched by his painted Woman, he paints her as a jeweled goddess with a rose between her thighs and beneath her belly. Finally realizing that he can never satisfy his goddess, Claude hangs himself in front of his mutilated canvas.

Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

The story begins with the artist, Claude Lantier, walking home late at night in Paris during a rainstorm. He considers himself a loser and is somewhat irascible as he trudges across the Seine on his way to his cheap studio flat after his night out on the town with friends. What troubles him is a rather large canvas he has been unable to complete. The painting is obscure in its meaning. It involves a park landscape, a fully clothed man watching two nude women frolic in the distance, and a nude woman reclining in the foreground. It is the reclining woman that has given him so much trouble. His painting style is revolutionary with vivid color and heavy brush strokes, offering an avant-guarde rejection of the Romanticism preferred by the École des Beaux-Arts.

Already in a foul mood, Claude finds a young woman standing in the doorway of his apartment building when he arrives home. The young woman is crying and begs Claude to help her get to Passy where, she says, she is expected to take up a new position. Claude, timid around women and suspicious of the girl's motives, is tempted to leave her standing there in the pouring rain when the storm increases in intensity and his compassion for the girl causes him to invite her in. The girl, Christine Hallegrain, torn between propriety and necessity, reluctantly accepts his offer. Antagonism between Claude and Christine arises over her insistence that she sleep in a chair wearing her soaked clothes. Claude's temper flares and the girl reluctantly agrees to sleep in Claude's bed behind a screen, tossing out her wet garments that Claude hangs up to dry overnight.

Christine, so alarmed by her situation, had been unable to fall asleep quickly. She sleeps soundly the next morning when Claude peeks in on her behind the screen. The vision of her asleep with one arm behind her head and one breast exposed where she had thrown off the cover in the rising heat of the morning takes Claude's breath away. Seeing her now not as a woman but as a model, he collects his pad and begins to sketch the sleeping Christine. When she awakes, alarmed that he is sitting so near looking at her in bed, she quickly covers herself. Claude begs her to model for him so that he can finish his sketch and she reluctantly agrees so long as he only sketches her face.

Dressed and almost ready to leave the flat, Christine is appalled by the condition of the studio and does what little she can to tidy things up. She is, however, shocked at the canvases all around the studio as she compares it to the romantic art she is accustomed to. Claude does not understand her refusal to allow him to accompany her to the train station, never thinking about the propriety of her being seen in the company of a man at such and early hour of the morning. After she has gone, Claude's temper rages again and he returns to his earlier suspicion that she is a lady of the evening rather than the proper young lady she appears to be. His rage is an irrational anger brought about by the effect that her presence in his flat had on him.

Chapter One Analysis

Émile Zola has woven the character of Claude Lantier from an amalgam of avant-guarde young artists of his day, most notably Cézanne, Monet, and Manet. In the novel, Claude is the accepted leader of a group of school friends from Plassans who have all come to Paris filled with ideas about overturning the conventional Romanticism in art, literature, and music. From the very beginning however, Claude appears to be the most troubled of his group, bearing in his soul the ideas of his artistic revolution but unable to produce the vision of his mind's eye. Claude is haunted by his own sense of inadequacy, often scraping his canvases clean to start over.

Christine represents the innocence of youth and the Provinçal attitude of what is acceptable in art. Zola uses a powerful metaphor in Christine's reaction to Claude's violence of the coloring that slashes through the shadows. The conflict within Christine is one of attraction to the artist but revulsion toward his art. Clearly from this opening chapter there is an attraction between Claude and Christine manifest in her domestic activity before leaving the studio and his rage after she leaves. The chapter closes with Claude contemplating the sketch he did of Christine's head as he sits in front of his unfinished canvas.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Pierre Sandoz, an aspiring writer and lifelong friend of Claude, drops in while Claude is hard at work on his big canvas. Sandoz is modeling as the fully clothed man in the painting to help Claude avoid the expense of another model. Claude is trying to finish the canvas in six months to prove to himself he is not completely hopeless as an artist. His goal is to enter the painting in the Salon at the École des Beaux-Arts, which is an annual event where a committee selects paintings, sculpture, and architectural design to be displayed in its exhibition. Sandoz is a writer and usually has a book of poetry with him wherever he goes. As he poses for Claude, the two of them discuss their school days which were the beginnings of their Bohemian lifestyle. They were influenced by Victor Hugo and Musset as they devoured literature of all kinds, including both the good and detestable. Theirs was a revolt against the stodgy bourgeois life of the provinces. To escape, from the time they were twelve until they were young men about to leave their provincial nests, they along with another friend, Dubuche, indulged in long nature hikes and spending whole days swimming naked in the river. From their adventures grew a love of nature and all things natural which they proclaimed as the way art and literature must go. Due to their own shyness, women were excluded from their association. Presently as young men who have met up again in Paris, their avant-guarde ideals have grown even stronger.

Ironically, neither Sandoz nor Dubuche appreciate Claude's picture of the clothed man and the nude women in his latest painting. Dubuche especially criticizes the painting by calling it unusual in a derogatory sort of way. Claude rants on about the Salon and the École des Beaux-Arts for its stubborn refusal to recognize anything new in art. Inner conflict arises in Claude as Sandoz and Dubuche admire the sketch of Christine, eager to meet the new model. As Dubuche rattles on and on about himself, Claude becomes exasperated with his work on the Open Air painting and is only prevented from destroying it by his dearest friend, Sandoz. Before the three of them leave the studio, Malgras, a rather sleazy art dealer drops in and takes a few of Claude's small paintings, although he has an eye for the large painting Claude is working on at the moment. He commissions a still life painting of a lobster before he finally leaves. Claude wipes away all but the head and shoulders of the reclining woman shortly before the three friends go out.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces the early boyhood relationships that began in the province and continue to the present in Paris. It explains the evolution of the group's Bohemian rebellion against the prevalent Romanticism in art and literature of the day. The semi-autobiographical Sandoz represents Zola himself. The development of their Open Air or Naturalist thinking came about from protracted hikes through the countryside when they

were boys. Claude, with his artist's eye, developed his preference for natural lighting as opposed to the dark studio lighting used by recognized artists of the day. Sandoz began to observe that literature was lacking the ability to portray life as it really is. The reminiscences of Claude and Sandoz reveal their especially deep friendship, their budding love of nature and the natural, and their shyness around women in recalling how they serenaded girls with cacophonous music played on the clarinet and cornet.

The young rebels on the art scene in Paris rage against the École des Beaux-Arts which represents the elitist tenacity for the status quo. They are shunned by the art establishment and have developed a young Turk reputation in Paris. Ironically, neither Sandoz nor Dubuche actually like Claude's Open Air painting but they prevent him from destroying it in a fit of pique. Claude's indecision and lack of self-confidence foreshadows tragedy to come in his life. Another foreshadowing lies in Claude's reaction to his friends' admiration for the girl in his sketch, thinking that she is just another model Claude found who is willing to doff her clothes for him to paint.

The arrival of the disgusting Malgras represents the way artists are exploited, paid almost nothing for their canvases. Malgras recognizes Claude's real genius and hopes to make a great deal of money buying his paintings. The contrast is between art and commerce.

Chapter 3, Part 1

Chapter 3, Part 1 Summary

The chapter begins with a lengthy description of the angst of Claude Lantier. At times he wants to be alone with his painting but at other times he needs the lively arguments with his friends. Even solitary walking through the streets of Paris fails to take his mind off his artistic impotence. Claude begins to recognize a certain aloofness that borders on hostility on the part of Dubuche. Going to Duquersonnièr's studio where he is lively to find Dubuche, the conflict between Claude and the aspiring architects shows itself in the rude comments directed at Claude and the exasperation of Dubuche at having Claude show up there. Claude feels his bad luck getting worse as he leaves Dubuche who is on his way to enter his architectural drawing in the upcoming competition. Stopping at a third rate wine-shop for a cheap lunch, Claude's despondency causes him to think he is not worthy of the meager fare. After a lingering lunch and stultifying conversation, Claude leaves the wine-shop and thinks of Fagerolles, who although one of the friends is now enrolled at the Beaux-Arts. Henri Fagerolles, a Parisian friend, was not at home. Claude is annoyed with himself for taking interest in the picturesque street where Fagerolles lives because it means there was still a vestige of romanticism left in him.

Finally deciding to disturb Pierre Sandoz before the usual Thursday night dinner, Claude goes to the one person who actually has a positive effect on him. Sandoz agrees to a walk admitting he had been struggling with one sentence for the last hour. In fact Sandoz and Claude have an uplifting effect on each other as they stroll the streets of Paris until Sandoz has the idea they should call on another friend, Mahoudeau, a sculptor. Making do with what he had in the way of capital, Mahoudeau had rented a former Fruit and Vegetable Shop which he has whited out the windows and called a studio. There is a brief foreshadowing as Claude and Sandoz look in the window of the herbalist's shop next to Mahoudeau's studio when they nudge each other as they observe the thin and dark woman staring at them from the doorway of the shop.

Mahoudeau, also from Plassans, was at first a stone cutter who won local competitions for his sculpture and was sent to Paris where he was out of his element and failed to gain admission into Beaux-Arts. Observing Mahoudeau's Bacchante, Claude is outraged and insists that Mahoudeau turn her into a peasant grape picker, and Mahoudeau somewhat awed by Claude's artistic authority acquiesces. At about that point, Sandoz discovers Chaîne, a former shepherd from near Plassans whose ability as a carver had won him a patron who sent him to Paris and the École des Beaux-Arts where he was not accepted. Chaîne now shares the studio and the one bed of Mahoudeau.

Chapter 3, Part 1 Analysis

This chapter continues to introduce more of the circle of young artistic rebels who look to Claude as their arbiter and spokesperson. Underlying these introductions, however, is a hint of dissatisfaction and ultimate dissolution of the group. Dubuche and Fagerolles have ipso facto deserted to the École des Beaux-Arts, although they loudly protest that it is for recognition only so that they will be better positioned to introduce their naturalist ideas in the future. The theme of antithesis is evident in Claude's up and down emotions. He thinks of himself as impotent when his painting does not go well and he is given to scraping great portions of his work off the canvas. Inner conflict also appears in the influence of Romanticism that pops into Claude's head from time to time. He knows where he wants art to go but struggles with how to get there. Émile Zola parallels the struggles of Claude, the painter, with those of Pierre Sandoz, the writer, although the two men handle the turmoil in vastly different ways.

Another theme, the starving artist, runs throughout the novel. There is a contrast between Claude, who lives hand to mouth in an attic loft that is the very picture of the squalor of poverty. Sandoz, on the other hand, lives in a reasonably nice flat and has the wherewithal to have guests for dinner every Thursday evening. Mahoudeau and Chaîne, also from the same Province as Claude and Pierre, represent raw talent that was outstanding in the country but severely lacking in Paris. Both of them are rejected by the École des Beaux-Arts and have been reduced to living together, even sharing the same bed.

The rather frightful looking woman standing in the door of the herbalist's shop suggests another element of poverty yet to come. From Claude's and Pierre's nudging each other as they pass the woman, it infers that there is something immoral about the woman.

Chapter 3, Part 2

Chapter 3, Part 2 Summary

While Claude and Pierre are visiting in the studio of the sculptors, Mahoudeau and Chaîne, Zola introduces another character, Jory, who comes in making rude comments about the wife of the herbalist next door. Mahoudeau appears embarrassed by his remarks, hinting that there is something going on between him and the homely woman. Jory recognizes he has put his foot in his mouth and tries to recover by asking, "Who ever said no to a woman?" Chaîne, frustrated with his sculpturing, has turned to painting and stays in the background working on a picture of the old stove in the studio. Claude, always trying to encourage, finds some value in the painting. Jory has become an art critic and recently stirred up a scandal by praising one of Claude's paintings, proclaiming him as the leader of a new school of Open Air painting. Jory, a lusty young man, is taken with Mahoudeau's Grape Picker because of her ample bosom and thick thighs. There is a conflict between Sandoz and Jory over debts and the value of money that causes the others to label Jory as a "dirty bourgeois," when a tap on the window interrupts the budding argument. Mathilde Jabouille, the thin wife of the herbalist, then enters, reeking of the smell of herbs that hang from the ceiling in her husband's shop. Her husband is wasting away, probably from consumption, and the shop has seen better days. As Mahoudeau makes his escape with his three Plassans friends, it is clear that Mathilde will be "pouncing on Chaîne" as soon as they are out of sight. Jory makes more disparaging remarks about the homely woman with her lined face and missing teeth.

As they march through the streets of Paris, Zola presents them as conquerors of Paris with disdain for the masses who did not share their enlightenment about art. Theirs is a youthful arrogance that makes them feel secure and unfazed by their own down at the heel boots and threadbare jackets. There appears another conflict between the character of Jory, who never crossed out so much as a line from his writing, and Sandoz, who spent an hour laboring over one sentence. On their walk, the young men run into Fagerolles sitting at a table making sketches with drops of beer. Zola indicates that his art comes easy for him and he has a knack for making a success out of everything in stark contrast with Claude Lantier. Also in the same café is Irma Bécot, a trollop who has all the makings of a future courtesan. Jory is interested in her but Fagerolles claims her as his own.

That evening at Pierre's Thursday soiree, Ganière and Dubuche come late. Ganière is independently well off and taught himself to paint in the Forest of Fontainebleu, turning out acceptable landscapes. Dubuche, the aspiring architect, is described as having gone beyond the pale by joining Society. Ganière has discovered a taste for music but is discouraged from talking about the subject during the meal. Dubuche, dressed in evening clothes, is teased mercilessly. The group goes off on the Beaux-Arts when Fagerolles tells a story about a model whose legs are not equal in size. After Sandoz goes to check on his invalid mother, talk turns to the Salon and the Selection Committee

and what artworks they are gong to submit this year. Jory declares that he is going to smash the Selection Committee. At this point, there is nothing to divide the group who are all bent on achieving success on their own terms and feel that any success of one is a success for all. Very late in the evening, Bongrand enters the flat. Independently well off, he is recognized for a painting called "The Village Wedding," which he hates to have mentioned in his presence. By not having to rely on his work for income, he has remained a true Bohemian. His word of wisdom to the assembled group is that the struggle to the top in the art world is preferable to being at the top.

Chapter 3, Part 2 Analysis

This part of the chapter further deals with the dynamics of the group of friends with Claude Lantier as their accepted leader. In the characters of Mathilde and Irma, the element of sexuality is introduced. Jory represents a greed for money whereas Fagerolles and Dubuche personify a desire for success in Society. Although at this point there is no overt discord among the friends, there remains a hint that they will be going their separate ways. Pierre Sandoz, the eternal optimist, represents a certain naivety that things will always stay the same among his close friends. Clearly there is a stronger bond between him and Claude than with any of the others.

The theme of antithesis is strong in the chapter as set forth in the conflicts within the group as well as inner conflicts of certain characters. The antithetical feeling about the Beaux-Arts and the desire to have their work accepted by the Salon comes strongly into play in the chapter. Dubuche's arrival dressed to the nines indicates the antithesis of trying to stand with one foot in one world and the other foot in another. Ganière represents the lack of drive to be successful in the world of painting as his interest seems to be shifting to the world of music, though at his age he can only be an aficionado rather than a participant.

Bongrand appears as the faded past, a break through artist who reached the pinnacle and found he had nowhere else to go. His leanings toward the new forms of art expression are only tolerated because of his earlier success. The chapter is replete with astonishing similes that make THE MASTERPIECE come alive for the reader.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Christine reenters Claude's life by dropping in on him unexpectedly, bearing a bouquet of flowers with the made-up excuse of wanting to express her gratitude for his previous kindness. Christine is employed in Passy by an invalid widow who treats her well and gives her occasional time off. Obviously, Christine has thought often of Claude and is drawn to him like a moth to flame. Claude is still awkward around Christine, but he is compelled physically by her youth, beauty, and innocence. Christine is repulsed by the paintings of nude women in Claude's studio and some of her own fear returns. She sees Claude's large canvas with her head painted onto the naked body of another woman as revolting and gets up to leave. Claude does not understand her sudden departure. Christine returns again and again over the next few months and gradually they become more comfortable in each other's company. She tells him all she remembers about her past in the convent in Clermont. The conflict within Christine is that of the genteel versus the housekeeper who enjoys beating the dust out of a rug. Yet, even after four months, she resists being seen in public in the company of a man until Claude gradually breaks down her objections and begins to show her around Paris.

It is now Claude who worries about meeting some of his friends when they go out walking. Inevitably, it happens when they run into Sandoz and Dubuche. Later, when Christine arrives unexpectedly, Claude is compelled not to answer Sandoz's knock at his door. On another occasion, Jory arrives with Irma who is bent on posing nude for Claude with Christine sitting on the bed behind the screen, hearing everything that is said. Irma's reaction to being spurned as a model presages something more to come in the future.

Because of her feelings for Claude, Christine is overcoming her distaste for his painting style but the large canvas he is trying to finish for the Salon still irritates her with her face on the nude body of another woman. Just days before the deadline to submit paintings to the Salon, Christine cannot stand Claude's agony and removes her clothes to model for the painting. When Claude has finished with the reclining nude in his painting, both he and Christine are afflicted with serious embarrassment as he turns his back for her to get back into her clothes. They have an awkward parting after he plants a kiss on her brow.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Much of this chapter is almost a tour guide of Paris manifesting Zola's great powers of observation and description. As Christine becomes less disturbed by the idea of meeting someone she knows while being out with Claude, he becomes more apprehensive of the possibility. Given that the friends are in the habit of walking the streets of Paris, it is not really coincidence that they should come face to face with

Sandoz and Dubuche. It is a reversal of roles that Claude is embarrassed by this meeting while Christine seems to enjoy being out.

Zola skillfully uses the event of Jory and Irma dropping in unexpectedly to set up the scenario whereby Christine decides to pose nude for Claude. The implied jealousy on the part of Christine as she overhears Irma practically begging to get naked for Claude eventually causes Christine to make the supreme sacrifice. It is clear, however, that she does not enjoy the experience. Irma's irritation at being spurned foreshadows a future act of revenge on her part as Zola skillfully implies that hell has no vengeance like a woman scorned.

The chapter only complicates the inner conflicts in Claude as he feels shame for using Christine as a nude model, regret for not answering the door when Sandoz knocks for an appointed meeting and his devotion to his art above all else.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Christine sends a bouquet of white lilacs to Claude in anticipation of his painting that will be shown in the Salon des Refusés, a new exhibition for works refused by the committee for the regular Salon showing. Collecting Sandoz, Claude goes to the Palais de l'Industrie where the exhibitions have been hung. They meet up with Bongrand who appears mildly amused by the dissatisfaction in the art community over the Selection Committee's activities. He compliments Claude for the painting of the buxom wench in his entry which is hanging upstairs. Bongrand's praise raises Claude's spirits thinking he has done something worth while at last. Although Sandoz is eager to get to Claude's painting, Claude himself feigns indifference. They run into Fagerolles who had just spent twenty minutes in front of Claude's painting but pretends he has not seen it yet and suggests they all go in to see it together. In one room they see Ganière and Irma Bécot. Fagerolles mentions that someone has furnished a flat for her. Again Irma is aggravated by Claude's lack of interest in her. Dubuche shows up with a family remarkable for their ugliness, the wife and daughter rather sickly looking. The man of the family is Margaillan, a self-made millionaire many times over.

They hear the sound of laughter and both Claude and Sandoz become exasperated with stupidity of the crowd. Forging ahead, they run into Jory who has seen Claude's painting and congratulates him. Claude is again overjoyed from the compliment, and together with Bongrand's comments, he now feels convinced of his genius. When they reach Claude's picture, the laughter is the loudest. The high praise of a moment ago gives way to bitter disappointment in Claude. Under the circumstances, Claude begins to pass judgment on his own work and his old insecurities flood him with doubt. The ones who are not laughing at the naked women and the clothed man are criticizing Claude's use of the color blue to indicate daylight. Margaillan particularly dislikes the painting and asks Dubuche to take their frail daughter, Régine, outside. Sandoz becomes angry when Ganière declares that Claude's painting is smutty. Fagerolles, unusually reserved, thinks it was sheer stupidity for Claude to believe in the intelligence of the public. He tells Claude that he brought the derision on himself.

Afterward, away from the Salon, the friends pontificate and Claude's observation is that all they need do is educate the public. The consensus among the group appears to be that the Open Sir School has been launched. Only Fagerolles plans to stay the accepted course to win the Prix de Rome sponsored by the École des Beaux-Arts. It is Sandoz who sees the potential trouble brewing in Claude's unusual cheerfulness. When Claude returns home, he discovers that the concierge had already given the key to his flat to Christine, and it is with her that he finally breaks down and admits his hurt. It is this night that they consummate their love.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, along with Émile Zola's incredible use of descriptive language, he manages to bring the tension to a high level by prolonging the moment when Claude comes face to face with the reality that his painting is being ridiculed by the public. The crumbling of the relationships among the group of friends Zola introduces like so much plaster flaking from the walls. The psychological tension is highlighted by their boisterous proclamation that the Open Air School has been launched and by Claude's unexpected abnormal cheerfulness. Sandoz is the only one who recognizes the turmoil going on within Claude, something he does not even recognize himself. Dubuche is shown being assimilated into the bourgeois by his association with Margaillan and family, though he still maintains a certain amount of the Bohemian.

It is the meeting with Christine that allows Claude finally to break down and admit his pain. Still perturbed by Claude's obsession with painted nudes, Christine nevertheless is more deeply in love with Claude in his weakness than ever before. In the sweet smelling atmosphere of the lilacs, she encourages the consummation of their love that night in Claude's studio.

Chapter 6, Part 1

Chapter 6, Part 1 Summary

After making love for the first time, Christine insists on returning to Madame Vanzade but returns the next morning after lying to the old woman that she needed to be in Paris to meet another friend coming to the city for the day. Christine is not comfortable with telling lies but she wants nothing more than to be with Claude. They leave Paris to go to the countryside and visit an inn called Bennecourt. Claude tells the proprietors that he and Christine are married. After a breakfast of omelets and sausage, they have until four o'clock in the afternoon to catch the train back to Paris. Now deeply in love with each other, they find a secluded spot and make love again. Exiting the wood, they come upon a house with an old man standing at the door. He asks Claude to recommend the place to anyone in Paris who might want to get away from the city. He first wants three hundred francs a year rent but comes down to two hundred fifty before they have to leave to catch their train. The germ of an idea to live in the country occurs to both Claude and Christine, but back in Paris a certain amount of reality sets in. Christine wants to stay with Claude who points out that Madame Vanzade may well bequeath her a sizable inheritance if she remains with the old woman. In the end, love wins out over practicality and Christine leaves Madame Vanzade's employment the very next day. Avoiding all of Claude's friends, they prepare to leave the city to live in the country house.

For Claude, the naturist, the arrangement immerses him in the open air and for the two of them, the romance grows with country strolls and boating to small islands in the river. Claude finds inspiration in the outdoors but he procrastinates although Christine urges him to paint. Finally he works in fits and starts. Christine has changed into a sensual and passionate lover but still blushes at any mention of their lovemaking or the occasional swear word that slipps from Claude's mouth. In the midst of their happiness, a sense of something separating them enters Claude's mind. On one of their outings, they are in the process of kissing each other when a family of three meets them in the road. Claude and Christine, already seen in their open affection, continue their fondling and walk past the family Claude recognizes as the Margaillan family he had met in the Salon des Refusés accompanied by Dubuche.

Things begin to shift for Claude and Christine during a bitter winter and Christine is confined because of pregnancy. Doubts begin to come to the fore in Claude's mind and Christine continues to encourage him to paint. In the spring, after the birth of Jacques, Claude becomes more restless and begins leaving the house to go down river to look for inspiration. Christine is unaware of the terrible rival she is creating for herself.

Chapter 6, Part 1 Analysis

Falling in love and having a conjugal relationship with Christine changes Claude for a time. Their act of removing themselves from Paris and therefore all of Claude's circle of friends, represents an escape from reality. There is evidence of 19th century European morality in their desire to not be seen by anyone who knows them. The Bohemian nature of Claude and more reluctantly of Christine comes out in the chance meeting of the Margaillan family in the country. The antithetical theme continues with the conflicting double standards of Claude and Christine. It is evidenced in their brazenness on the road as opposed to the scandalized reaction of Margaillan. Zola foreshadows disaster by commenting on the fact that by urging Claude to take up his painting again she was actually creating a terrible consequence for herself. The arrival of the baby Jacques with a large head and frail body creates a wedge between Christine and Claude, bringing an end to their previously romantic state of bliss during long walks and boat rides. Ironically, it is Christine more than Claude who appears resentful of the child.

Chapter 6, Part 2

Chapter 6, Part 2 Summary

Christine slowly grows to appreciate more the paintings that Claude turns out in the country. Although, she comes to understand Claude's use of blue in the poplar trees and mauve in the ground, the ordered part of her psyche refuses to accept that trees are not all green and the dirt is not really brown. Conflict within Christine grows the more Claude goes off to the river to paint and she needs constant reassurance that he loves her. Nevertheless, Christine is not the only one for whom the flickering passion of young love has begun to glow dimmer. He starts to miss his old friends and a longing to be in Paris begins to grow in his mind. After winter, Claude runs into Dubuche walking in the countryside and they make an awkward reunion. Dubuche, dressed to the nines, is on his way to see the Margaillan family which annoys Claude and causes Dubuche to bristle and make a case for admiring Margaillan. In parting Claude raises the question about his old friends and invites Dubuche to tell them all to come to the country for a visit. Later Christine meets a familiar looking man on the road looking for Claude's house and guides him there only to learn that the gentleman is Pierre Sandoz. Christine takes to Sandoz immediately and realizes that he has a positive influence on Claude. In the conversation between Sandoz and Claude, the subject of marriage comes up and Sandoz suggests Claude should make an honest woman out of Christine.

Back in Paris the competition between the friends is a pretty good fight to see who gets to the top of the tree first, according to Sandoz. Sandoz says that people who stay away from Paris are making a mistake but continues to say that the ideal would be to live in the country, pile up masterpieces, and return to take Paris by storm. As he is leaving the country house, he mentions that he is thinking about getting married. He continues to visit Claude and Christine until the autumn when he is getting married. In the renewal of the friendship between Claude and Sandoz, there is a reawakening of their old desire for fame.

Claude begins talking incessantly about people in Paris Christine has never known. One story that causes Claude nervous mirth is how Mahoudeau and Chaîne "massaged the life out of Jabouille," the consumptive husband of Mathilde. Claude is irritated that Christine does not share his enjoyment of that tale. Fagerolles, by now completely involved with École des Beaux-Arts , was rejected for the Prix de Rome and is painting slick, compromising pictures that appear to be daring on the surface, according to Sandoz, yet without a single original quality in them. As their feelings about the countryside diminish, Christine is aware that something is changing between them, though she cannot put her finger on the exact thing that is changing. To save Claude and save her marriage, Christine says that she is going to pack and return to Paris and he is going to come with her.

Chapter 6, Part 2 Analysis

Émile Zola creates a foreboding transition in this chapter as Paris begins to call Claude to return. Pierre Sandoz returns to Claude's life and the strong attachment of life-long friendship overshadows the romantic idyll that was once Claude's and Christine's country home. Things are changing in Paris as well. Both Dubuche and Sandoz are getting married, and Sandoz suggests that Claude should make an honest woman out of Christine. Fagerolles has gone over to the enemy, although he flatly denies it. The presence of Jacques in the house has also diminished the carefree happiness Christine and Claude once felt on their walks and boat rides which never happen now. Zola uses the rotting of the boat as a symbol of the decay of their happiness there. Claude insists that they shall never return to Paris, but Christine recognizes that they must. As they finally leave the old house, Zola employs another symbol of the end in the form of the last rose from a deserted garden.

Chapter 7, Part 1

Chapter 7, Part 1 Summary

The moment they are back in Paris, Claude hits the streets in his old habits leaving Christine to settle into the studio they have rented. Claude's first visit is to Mahoudeau who is the epitome of the starving artist, enduring the cold in his studio and taking what few commissions he can get. Interestingly he says that there is not much of a market for angels and saints any longer. His one bit of artistic work is called Woman Bathing, a statue of a nude woman dipping her toes in to test the water. Claude's initial comment is that she is pretty good in spite of her hefty thighs, but he must reserve comment until she is finished. Chaîne is still living there with Mahoudeau, though the two of them are not speaking to each other over their sharing of the widow Mathilde. Her herbalist shop next door is going to ruin, but Mathilde is far more interested in getting her next man than in trying to clean up her shop. When Jory arrives on the scene and bumps into Claude, it is obvious that he is looking for Mathilde and finally admits that the "whole gang" visits Mathilde these days. He finally breaks down and tells Claude that he thinks Mathilde is an amazing creature, the sort of woman you never admit to touching but do amazing things for her anyway. It is clear that Jory has a sexual addiction which he is able to satisfy at little or no cost because he is not really particular about his conquests. Jory insists that Claude accompany him to see Irma Bécot who now pays twenty thousand francs in rent and is talking about building herself a mansion. Claude's reaction upon seeing Irma after so long a time since he spurned her offer to pose nude for him is that she has changed herself from a common guttersnipe into a "courtesan by Titian." Irma exposes Jory as an inveterate liar and comments that she and Fagerolles "grew out of the same gap in the pavement."

Claude next meets up with Bongrand as he and Jory visit the older artist's studio. The older master, financially independent, only works on what suits him but cannot be overlooked by the Beaux-Arts because of his earlier masterpiece that everyone is familiar with. Interestingly, he, like Claude, often thinks what he is currently working on is bad. The conversation evolves into the topic of celebrity. Bongrand explains why the journey to the top is far better than being at the top. He says that when you know that your best has been given, it is a surprise that it does not give greater satisfaction.

The conversation turns to Fagerolles with Jory praising his picture of the actress looking in the mirror. Bongrand denigrates the painting as a shameless application of Claude's new school to Beaux-Arts formula style that caters to people who have money but no taste. He declares Claude to be the best artist of his day. In an attempt to defend Fagerolles, Jory mentions that he has just landed a good contract with Naudet.

Chapter 7, Part 1 Analysis

In starting to show the changes in Claude, Zola begins by touching on the changes that have taken place among the friends in Paris during Claude's absence. Zola uses a subtle foreshadowing with Claude and Christine going separate ways domestically. Moral deterioration is symbolized with the wanton Mathilde and the overt courtesan, Irma. There is a clear undercurrent of revenge formulating in the mind of Irma who still smarts from Claude's rejection of her as a model. Moral conflict also shows up in Claude's guilty feeling about discussing Christine with Irma. Jory is revealed more as self-serving and miserly. He loves to stir things up and never reacts to accusations like Irma calling him a notorious liar. Bongrand represents the pinnacle of success and the luxury of thumbing his nose at the establishment. He does not enjoy his success as much as he enjoyed getting there. He is trying to get across to Claude that where he is at the moment is the best of all times, though Claude seems to miss the point.

Fagerolles has gone over to the other side while still maintaining that he has not. Bongrand has his number and degrades his intention to keep one foot in both worlds. Jory, who helped make his success by writing complimentary articles about him, attempts to defend Fagerolles by mentioning that he has landed a remunerative contract with Naudet, the premiere art dealer in Paris.

Chapter 7, Part 2

Chapter 7, Part 2 Summary

The mention of Naudet puts Bongrand into a snit. In contrast to the shabby Malgras, Naudet elevated the position of art dealer to one of high esteem. Naudet is all about appearances in contrast to the ratty-looking Malgras. His personal marketing includes fine clothes, jeweled tie pin, hired carriage, a box at the Opera, a table at Brignon's, and care taken to be seen in all the right places. Naudet is a gambler and speculator with a flair for spotting a good deal but completely indifferent to good painting. His clientele are wealthy young investors who know nothing about art but buy in hopes of an increase in value at a later date. Bongrand improvises a conversation between Fagerolles and Naudet which demonstrates Naudet's ability at business. Bongrand laments that prices for paintings go up and up and are fought over by bank notes. Coincidentally, while they are discussing Naudet, he drops in. Bongrand insults the man, but he overlooks it. He is there to buy a painting which Bongrand says is already sold, though Jory and Claude know it is not. Once Naudet leaves, Bongrand confesses the painting is not sold and says to let Naudet go to Fagerolles.

For the Thursday night gatherings, Sandoz who is now married to Henriette, suggests that Claude not bring her to the dinners because they are not married and people gossip. Sandoz and Henriette are now in a small but tasteful cottage that Claude has a bit of difficulty finding. Sandoz compares their place to being in the country. Henriette is the picture of domesticity, a tall, elegant woman who prefers to do her own cooking even though they have a maid. Sandoz is doing fairly well with his novels though he is getting trounced by the critics. To Sandoz's credit, he maintains his literary integrity and writes as he feels. Claude observes that Sandoz is happy, working, and producing something. Still Sandoz talks about the same torment and despair that Claude is altogether familiar with. Jory, Ganière, and Mahoudeau arrive but Dubuche sends word that he will drop in about eleven. Fagerolles has said he would come but has not shown up. They are in the process of eating when Fagerolles shows up, elegantly dressed in fine fitting clothes.

Claude recognizes the deterioration of the group with the exception of Sandoz who is still the same if somewhat oblivious to the changes in all the others. The individuals in the group all talk about themselves and obviously are not listening to the others. Fagerolles has distanced himself from the hot-headed revolutionaries of his youth. Fagerolles leaves early, and it becomes evident that Henriette has taken over the duties of caring for Sandoz's invalid mother. Jory explains why he has not written about the others because nobody has a good word for any of them and he is not writing for his own paper. They look to Claude to make a difference, to conquer the public and create a new art. The warmth leaves the party and Bertrand, the dog, comes begging for sugar before going to sleep near the fire.

Dubuche arrives alone, having been careful never to mention his wife so that he will not be compelled to bring her to one of the gatherings. He talks about the overwhelming amount of work he has, the problems of moving into a new home, and a street of houses he and his father-in-law are putting up in Parc Manceau. Later Claude finds Ganière alone at their old table in the Café Baudequin. When Claude speaks to his friend, the subject turns quickly from art to music and Ganière is now left with a cavalcade of dreams. When Claude finally returns home, the lamp had gone out and Christine has fallen asleep with her head resting on the table.

Chapter 7, Part 2 Analysis

Émile Zola sees the commercialism creeping into the world of art, though he could hardly have imagined the obscene amount of money exchanged today for paintings by artists of his day. Naudet represents the clash between commercialism and art for art's sake. Bongrand represents the artists whose aspirations center on public acceptance and appreciation for their work rather than some artificial monetary value placed on them. Jory, the journalist, sees nothing wrong with the work of the art dealer. His position represents the power of the press to make or break an artist or writer. Yet, Jory is constrained to push only artists about whom the public has something good to say.

Sandoz is oblivious to the disintegration of the group. His jolly and kind nature does not allow him to see the different directions his friends have taken. Although he is making money with his novels, he still looks to Claude as the leader of the group he assembles every Thursday evening in his home. Henriette represents the perfect wife—cultured and tactful, doing her own cooking. Actually, Christine does not suffer in comparison to her.

Bertrand, the dog, lends an air of domestic bliss, sleeping noisily by the fire. The party disintegrates more than just breaking up for the evening. Ganière, brooding alone in the café, represents the idea that divided loyalties lead to mediocrity.

A heavy symbol concludes the chapter when Zola writes that "the lamp had gone out."

Chapter 8, Part 1

Chapter 8, Part 1 Summary

Christine throws herself into housekeeping to make their small studio livable. Jacques is constantly in the way and Christine is increasingly under a great deal of nervous tension. Claude is once again under the spell of Paris, sketching and planning a series of great works that he never seems to get started. He senses that the art climate in Paris is changing, noting that Delacroix had died without students and Courbet was followed by only a few clumsy imitators. Claude begins believing in his own genius, and for the next three years he struggles but never weakens from his conviction that he is right. He goes out, even in the snow, and paints which complicates his task immeasurably. Hailed by his friends as a masterpiece, his snow scene with two ragged urchins eating stolen apples is nevertheless rejected by the Salon. This resurrects Claude's old doubts and insecurities. The next year he works on a scene of Paris in the blazing sunlight. Once again his friends shout the originality of the piece but secretly feel that he is headed for martyrdom. When the Committee rejects this painting as well, Claude resolves that he is not giving up, that he will die first. Still he begins to slip back into the old doubts, questioning whether his eyes were failing him. Finishing up one painting but thinking about the next one, his enthusiasm for the work at hand begins to fade away. In addition to the inner struggles, material problems begin to surface. Claude resents having to face his inner demons and the problems of existing in the physical world.

Gradually, Christine begins to realize that it is painting that is taking her lover away from her. Her role evolves into both lover and mother to Claude, but there are ceaseless demands on her sympathy and understanding. Claude is beginning to make Christine unhappy, treating her as a woman who has ceased to mean anything to him. Still, however, Christine still has that great physical desire for Claude and as a result, becomes less of a mother to little Jacques. Beyond that, Paris is not good for the child who was used to running around in nature. Claude finds one customer who buys several of his paintings and Malgras purchases one last painting from him. It is a view of Ile de la Cité that captures Claude's attention and Christine senses that there is more than a physical break between them. The next morning, Claude goes jauntily off to view the Ile de la Cité once again but Christine is faced with trying to feed the family without a sou left in the house. She pawns her one good dress to get ten francs to buy enough to make a meager meal. Claude comes home late, and complains about his dinner. For the rest of the evening, Claude sits at the table sketching out things he saw today at the heart of Paris. Showing his sketches to Christine, she can make nothing of them but compliments them nonetheless.

Chapter 8, Part 1 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader begins to understand how Christine is slowly recognizing that Art is the mistress stealing her husband's affections away from her. Claude becomes more neglectful, leaving all the domestic problems to her. After his winter scene is rejected by the Salon, Claude becomes more determined. The theme of antithesis returns with Claude's disdain for the Salon yet still trying desperately to have one of his paintings accepted there. Determined, he tries again with a Paris scene in the bright, overhead sunlight, taking the use of light in his painting to a new level. That, too, is rejected. He falls back into old patterns of dejection and morose. His work is disturbed by his thinking ahead to the next painting. The symbolism of the break between Claude and Christine is powerfully depicted on one of their walks as Claude physically breaks away from Christine to return for another look at the Ile de la Cité, which has captured his imagination. The break, Zola writes, is more than physical.

On top of her other worries, Christine is faced with feeding the family when there is no money left in the house. She sacrifices her one good dress to the pawnshop in order to buy food. The meal is meager, and Claude complains that Christine does not handle money well and should have at least included a scrap of meat in the soup. Claude means well, but he is blissfully unaware of the hardships he is putting Christine through. Zola uses narrative about her everyday life to get the point across.

Yet another symbolic circumstance arises when Claude shows Christiane sketches he has made from memory of the Ile de la Cité. Although she does not understand the hasty drawings, she tries to be encouraging and imply that she sees what he is getting at.

Chapter 8, Part 2

Chapter 8, Part 2 Summary

Claude informs Christine that he has heard of Madame Vanzade's death and that she left her loyal servants well off in her will. He suggests to Christine that she is now sorry that she had given it all up to be with him. Christine is shocked at Claude's suggestion that she might have been after Madame Vanzade's money, although she weeps at the thought that life holds nothing in store for her now as Claude drifts away from her. Claude consoles her by suggesting that it was she who discovered his picture for him. Instead of making Christine feel better, it only reminds her that she is playing second fiddle to a painting. Jacques, constantly neglected, is pictured falling asleep on his picture book, his enormous head marking him as the flawed offspring of a genius. Bowing to convention and wishing to make Christiane happy once again, Claude suggests that they marry. On the day of their wedding, Claude goes off to collect Mahoudeau to discover that he and Chaîne had made a final break from each other and Mathilde had suddenly disappeared from the herbal shop next door. Claude sees Mahoudeau's sculpture of the Woman Bathing as his friend lights a fire to take some of the chill and moisture out of the air. As the room warms, the sculpture begins to soften and fall, landing on Mahoudeau as he tries in vain to save her. Mahoudeau's comment is that "this is what poverty gets you." Both artists get teary-eyed over the disaster.

The wedding is a civil ceremony, rushed through and without emotion. Immediately following the ceremony, Christian endures three hours of Claude and his friends discussing Mahoudeau's misfortune with his sculpture. Ganière and Jory are in the party and Mahoudeau says he saw Jory and Mathilde the other day. It turns out that Jory is keeping her in a small apartment. They feed Jacques and put him to bed, then Christine sits at the table with folded hands and watches Claude who has plunged once again into his sketches.

Christine finally goes to bed alone to be joined hours later by an exhausted Claude. When he begins to talk about Mahoudeau's bather, Christine buries her head in the pillow and begins to weep. It finally dawns on Claude that today of all days he should have gone to bed when she had. When he takes her body at that point, there is no longer the passion they had known before. The marriage seems to have done away with love.

Chapter 8, Part 2 Analysis

This chapter might well be viewed as a comedy of errors. The irony is that what Claude intends as a gift for Christine turns out to be a disastrous end to the passion they once had for each other. Claude's talking about the magnificent belly of Mahoudeau's ruined sculpture only emphasizes his erotic attachment to art.

The picture of little Jacques falling asleep with his head on a picture book symbolizes parental neglect and the failure of the boy to thrive. There is more symbolism when the lamp flickers out just as Claude finally lies down beside Christine.

Zola has skillfully painted a picture of a disintegrating marriage. Christine's sitting at the table with her hands folded is a dynamic image of resignation, while the image of the little boy asleep with his head on a picture book symbolizes the utter neglect he has endured throughout his young life. He is so repressed by both of his parents it is almost as though he is not there.

Claude is blissfully unaware of the hurt he gives to Christine. He is so wrapped up in himself that it never occurs to him what all she does for him or how much she loves him. In effect, he has returned to his bachelor days with the added convenience of a wife to see to his meals and laundry.

Chapter 9, Part 1

Chapter 9, Part 1 Summary

Putting more distance between him and his family, Claude searches out a larger place to work on his masterpiece. He draws from the capital of his inheritance rather than wait for his annual one thousand francs. He reasons that with this painting he will at last find success, so why not live comfortably on his own money? Claude has now reached the point where he lives only for his picture. He has the frame specially made and buys seamless canvass and builds a special scaffolding so he can work on the enormous canvas. His mind is constantly on the Cité whether in his shed turned studio or in the shadow of the Pont des Saints-Pères. From the beginning, Claude makes one mistake after another on his canvas. Fagerolles praises the work he has done and seems to have pronounced a curse on the project. As before, Claude works himself out in one great burst of genius only to be unable to continue. Frustrated, he abandons work on the large canvas and does a smaller version which is later rejected by the Selection Committee of the Beaux-Arts. When the painting returns, Claude demolishes it and burns the torn strips of canvas in the stove. Although he does nothing for a full year, Claude is never in doubt about his genius. When he gets started again on the large canvas, Sandoz is allowed to see his sketches. Once again Claude has placed a nude woman predominantly in the painting. Subtly, Sandoz tries to dissuade Claude from doing that, but Claude does not hear the real objection—that the public is just not ready for such a picture. To Claude the nude woman is the incarnation of Paris.

Concerned about the amount of money they are spending, Christine persuades Claude to allow her and Jacques to live in the back part of his studio so they will not be paying double rent. However, Christine is overcome with jealousy at the painting which has enthralled Claude like a mistress. She stays close to him, touching him surreptitiously and tries painting along side of him. The result of that attempt only makes Claude treat her like a man working along side him as another artist. Gradually, Christine becomes Claude's model, though she is still reluctant to pose nude, feeling it was unbecoming of her as a wife. Finally, however, she makes up her mind to become the model for his nude woman in the painting which had become her one and only rival for his affections. Jacques becomes the victim of neglect as he is shut up in the back of the house while Christine poses naked for Claude's work. Claude talks incessantly about the shape and texture of the skin as he paints his naked woman and comments that with Christine as his model he must surely be able to turn out a masterpiece. Christine realizes with painful accuracy that Claude is now worshiping her body only as an artist rather than a lover and husband.

Claude goes through the same highs and lows with this painting he has suffered with the others. In a fit of pique, he smashes his fist through the canvas and Christine feels elated that her rival has been done in. However, remorsefully, Claude turns his attention to mending the canvas, and Christine dutifully helps. Claude works on new ways of applying his paint and concocting his colors, drawing from Ganière's idea of

complementary colors. The science of color befuddles Claude's eye and the work deteriorates once again. Going out, Claude meets up with Irma Bécot who has never given up her need for revenge. She is now a high class courtesan living in her own expensive mansion. She seduces Claude and sends him away the next morning vowing that she will never allow him into her bed again. Claude is overcome with remorse and finally confesses to Christine who was at least glad that the rival in this case was another woman and not his painting.

Chapter 9, Part 1 Analysis

Symbolically, Claude's move into his new studio represents a further break up of his marriage. Disaster is foreshadowed in the fact that Claude is convinced that he will finally produce his masterpiece and, throwing caution to the wind, breaks into the capital that has provided him a thousand francs a year income. The extraordinary large size of the canvas Claude begins to work on indicates the grand idea he has of his success. Fagerolles' praise of Claude's sketches amounts to a kiss of death. Again Émile Zola points out the need Claude has for the recognition of others, the insecurity he has that always prevents him from achieving his goals. The antithetical situation of Claude's submitting paintings to the Salon only to be rejected once again shows the need Claude has for recognition. He never seems to learn that his new style of painting will never be accepted by the establishment. When his latest painting is rejected by the Salon, instead of being angry at the stodgy Committee, Claude once again questions himself and burns the canvas when it is returned.

The person who suffers most in their dysfunctional family is the neglected child, Jacques. As his body wastes away causing his head to appear abnormally large, neither of his parents seem to notice. Determined to win Claude's affections once again, Christine removes her clothes and poses for his nude woman in the foreground of his gigantic painting. Christine soon realizes that the woman in the painting is not her at all but her chief rival. Claude speaks of the painting as though she were a real woman.

For a brief moment, Christine thinks she has won when Claude smashes his fist through the canvas. His subsequent one night stand with Irma Bécot merely parallels his affection for his woman in the painting where both of them bring him only remorse and dissatisfaction. Zola makes clear that Christine has rightfully accused the woman in the painting as being her rival for Claude when she is secretly glad that Irma Bécot is a real woman and not a figment of Claude's imagination.

Chapter 9, Part 2

Chapter 9, Part 2 Summary

As Claude returns to work on his grand painting, once again he is dissatisfied with what he is doing and begins to blame Christine for not being the model she was years ago when she posed for his Open Air painting. Not really meaning to be unkind, Claude as the artist rants about Christine's body changed by having given birth. She is devastated, realizing that her rival is one woman. It is herself as a virgin model in the first painting and now as a much older woman with a body that shows the effects of childbirth and age. Claude once again makes a stab at pulling his foot out of his mouth and once again Christine forgives him. Christine is aware that Jacques never really aroused her maternal instincts and has come to hate him for depriving her of the body that once appealed to Claude as a lover.

The rift widens between the old friends. Ganière has married his old maid music teacher and lives in one of his inherited houses subsiding on the rent from the other. Mahoudeau is making a modest living doing touch up work for a manufacturer of art bronzes. Jory, now married to Mathilde, is kept on a tight leash by his wife who manages his purse. Fagerolles, now a success, is too busy to follow up on his promises to visit. Dubuche, in constant disagreement with his father-in-law, lives in a perpetual sick-room environment with his ailing wife. Sandoz is the only friend who knows the way to Claude's studio. On one visit, Claude is out and Sandoz notices that Jacques is quite ill. Christine blames his illness on his age of twelve years. When Claude returns, Jacques's illness is relegated to his growing pains and attention turns to Claude's painting that he has decided to submit to the Salon. Sandoz again questions the inclusion of the nude and semi-nude women in the foreground. Claude refuses to give Sandoz an explanation for keeping them in the painting. Claude tells Sandoz about meeting an old painter everyone had thought was dead and how after having produced a masterpiece is now living like an old grocer, paying a high price for glory. Sandoz wonders whether it might be better to live and die an unknown. He discusses the torments he goes through while doing his writing. He concludes with a long monologue about artistic criticism.

That night, Claude determines to start fresh with the painting. The next morning, however, Jacques is found dead in his bed. Christine is devastated by guilt and regrets. Claude, at first stunned and weeping, begins to see the scene as a work of art and begins sketching the dead boy, working for five hours for a painting. When Sandoz returns for a visit, he comments that he likes the painting of Jacques. Claude then determines to send that in to the Salon this year because the other painting is not ready.

Chapter 9, Part 2 Analysis

Zola presents Claude on another high as he begins work anew on his painting that he is sure to be a masterpiece. The roller coaster ride of Claude's highs and lows is consistent throughout the novel. Claude works feverishly until he starts to feel inadequate and becomes dissatisfied with the way things are going. This time he blames Christine for his failure. Not meaning to, but being cruel nonetheless, he criticizes her body as a model which he says is making the painting come out all wrong. The imagery here is one of an artist looking at his naked wife simply as an object to be used to create his painting. Zola does a masterful job of making the reader understand the psychology of Claude who is really kind hearted but often cruel in his speech. In her passion for her husband, Christine realizes that she is lacking in maternal instincts to the point of hating her sickly child for having spoiled the body Claude once adored. Zola goes into the dark side of Christine's mind to paint her as a woman desperate to save her marriage.

Coincidentally with the divide between Claude and Christine, there is a growing rift between the old friends. Each has gone his separate way, and only Sandoz remains friendly with Claude. It is through his eyes that the reader becomes aware of the dark side of the situation. Another premonition of disaster occurs as Claude relates meeting the aged artist Courajod, an artist they had all admired for his masterpiece hanging in the Luxembourg Museum. Again there is the metaphor of success equating to public approval. This launches Sandoz into a long discourse about the pains of being an artist or writer with a lengthy monologue about critics.

Pitifully, Jacques dies alone in his bed during the night. Christine is overcome with remorse for all her failings as a mother. Claude, grieving as well, turns his grief into an occasion for art, sketching the boy as he lies on his deathbed. Claude has no emotion except what he can express through art. When Sandoz sees the painting of the boy, he says he likes it and Claude determines to submit it to the Committee for this year's Salon.

Chapter 10, Part 1

Chapter 10, Part 1 Summary

Claude has submitted his painting of the dead child and is waiting to see if this one will be accepted. Walking around, he runs into Fagerolles who is up for election to the Salon committee and he suggests he may be able to get the painting included in the Salon. They see Irma and Fagerolles says that she has a palace while he has nothing to sell but pictures. Inside Fagerolles small but well appointed mansion, Claude wonders if everything he sees is paid for. It is known that Naudet is getting top prices for Fagerolles's work. Fagerolles lives as though he will always be able to sell his paintings. Fagerolles's entry in this year's salon is an outdoor lunch scene, an idea that is directly attributable to Claude's influence. It turns out that Fagerolles is on Irma's beck and call from her palatial mansion across the street. Being Irma's secret lover is costing him a great deal of money. Claude is uncomfortable with Fagerolles's offer to help him get his painting in this year. When the voting is done, Fagerolles has been elected to the Committee. Claude waits anxiously for a fortnight to see if his picture will be included this year. Fagerolles engages in all kinds of bargaining to try and get the painting selected. Mistakes are made and hastily corrected when a painting of a nude lady under a tree is rejected only to find out it was done by an old master highly respected by Beaux-Arts. The painting of the Dead Child shocks or amuses the committee and Fagerolles has an uphill fight to get it in. Bongrand will not use his "charity" to have the painting hung because he says it is an insult to the artist. Finally, Fagerolles has to use his one "charity" to have the painting included. All of this activity is unknown to Claude.

Chapter 10, Part 1 Analysis

There is something prophetic in the fact that Claude's entry this year is a painting of a dead child. The symbolism could well be applied to Claude's career as an artist. Just as Jacques wasted away, there is a sense that Claude's work is rapidly failing to thrive. Once again there is the antithesis of disdain for the Salon and an almost desperate need to be recognized by it. There is pathos in the failure of Claude against the success of the courtesan, Irma Bécot, and Fagerolles who has compromised his beliefs for the sake of pure commerce. Yet there is an irony in the fact that Fagerolles resembles the courtesan in that he has prostituted his philosophy of art for the sake of money and position. There is also an undercurrent of guilt on the part of Fagerolles because he has taken Claude's ideas and merged them with a style that is acceptable to the Beaux-Arts. Even Claude succumbs to allowing Fagerolles go to bat for him, knowing that if his painting is accepted it will not be on its own merits. This fact points out the need Claude feels for public recognition rather than financial success.

Bongrand, in the selection process, makes the strongest statement against the superficiality of the Salon when he refuses to use his "charity" to hang Claude's painting. He says that Claude needs to learn more self-respect and never submit a

painting to the Committee again. Fagerolles receives mixed responses when he finally agrees to use his "charity" to include Claude's painting in the Salon.

Chapter 10, Part 2

Chapter 10, Part 2 Summary

Fagerolles's note to Claude that his painting has been accepted leave him with mixed emotions. Still, the pride of being included in this year's Salon stimulates the yearning for recognition. Although Claude dreads putting in an appearance on "varnishing day" when the elite of Paris will be there, his excitement causes him to go anyway. Christine does not go, lacking courage to face what she fears may happen. In the Hall, the abominably dress women are settling down for a day of scandal mongering at one of the great social events in Paris.

Going around to look for his painting, Claude is unable to locate it. Back in the main Hall he notes that every aspect of Parisian society is represented from high government officials to the flamboyant courtesans. He notices a well-known critic who bears the countenance of one who has made up his mind not to be impressed with anything. The general atmosphere is herd-like, devoid of any real enthusiasm. When Fagerolles comes in, he is bombarded with well wishers and those who desire a favor from him. Claude's pride does not allow him to go to Fagerolles and ask where his painting is hung. He decides there must be rooms that he has not yet entered. He comes across Fagerolles's large painting called The Lunch Party. It is an obvious imitation of Claude's Open Air style that has been romanticized for the public market. Claude studies the crowd looking at the painting. Next to The Lunch Party is Bongrand's final masterpiece called the Village Funeral. Claude is impressed with the painting that the crowd barely notices after viewing Fagerolles's painting. Naudet enters talking of dominating the art dealership market and treats Fagerolles as though he owns him.

When Claude finally locates The Dead child, it is hanging so high that people pass it by without even looking up. Sandoz arrives and goes straight to Claude, pointing out to him the many bright paintings that have plagiarized his Open Air concept. Sandoz realizes that Claude is disappointed and takes him out of the Salon where they meet up with Jory, who has married Mathilde, and Mahoudeau. Everyone agrees that if Mahoudeau's sculpture, scaled down from a woman to a young girl testing the bath water with her toe had been better placed he would now be the talk of Paris.

Back at home that night, Christine becomes afraid because of Claude's strange and cold manner.

Chapter 10, Part 2 Analysis

The chapter deals with the evolution of painting in Paris as a direct result of Claude's Open Air school. The irony is that while the new ideas make the careers of many young artists, Claude has never been able to make a career for himself. Fagerolles has blatantly borrowed from Claude, distorting the painting to suit the public taste. Sadly,

Claude feels the hurt more deeply from being ignored than he did when people laughed at his earlier work. There is a parallel in Fagerolles involvement with the Beaux-Arts and Naudet and Jory's marriage to Mathilde. Just as Fagerolles was always a vocal exponent of the new Open Air school, Jory was always the one who spoke the most disparaging words about Mathilde.

Knowing that Irma has already labeled Jory as a liar, it is not surprising when he speaks ill of The Dead Child before he realizes he is within earshot of Claude. Without missing a breath he begins to tell Claude what a fine painting it is.

Foreshadowing is obvious when Claude returns home and gives Christine only the barest report on the Salon. There is something about the cold and detached way about Claude that frightens her.

Chapter 11, Part 1

Chapter 11, Part 1 Summary

Claude has put on a façade of not caring about his masterpiece anymore after the disappointment of the Salon. For a while, he makes a fairly good living painting flower pictures for British tourists. In his spare time, however, he works on the big canvas in the studio. Even Sandoz is absent for quite a while as his books start selling and he and Henriette move into larger and better quarters. He is also dealing with the bereavement of losing his mother. Nevertheless, he has not forgotten Claude and is quite anxious about him. when he does drop in for a visit, he can see that Christine is also concerned about a dread she dares not speak openly about. She only hints at her fear by asking Sandoz if he had noticed Claude's eyes. On one of their outings that Sandoz tries to arrange often, he and Claude run into Chaîne who has been reduced to a barker in his booth at a carnival. Chaîne's three good paintings are hanging in the back of the booth and Claude is impressed. He feels that Chaîne is happy, but Sandoz sets him straight. The truth is that Chaîne lives with the disappointment of never making it in the Beaux-Arts. Sandoz next coaxes Claude into going to visit Dubuche, now living in the countryside near where he and Christiane used to live. Claude does not want to leave his big canvas and only reluctantly agrees to go with Sandoz. Dubuche, at odds with his father-in-law, has been reduced to being a caregiver to his two sickly children and his invalid wife. So many things have changed in the area that the charm that once drew him to the place no longer exists. After seeing the depths to which Dubuche has plunged and the devastation of the once beautiful countryside, Claude is ready to return to Paris, wishing he had never come back to the place. Having missed their train, Sandoz and Claude have a miserable two hour wait for the next one so they plan to enjoy a dinner together in Paris like the old days.

Chapter 11, Part 1 Analysis

This chapter could well be called the trail of broken dreams. Fagerolles and Jory have sold out their once strongly held ideas about art to become recognizable parts of the establishment. Chaîne and Dubuche have come to bitter ends, never able to realize their ambitions. In spite of Claude's façade of indifference, he is as connected to his painting as ever, doggedly determined to turn out his great masterpiece on his own terms. He is so self-centered that he actually imagines that Chaîne is happy. Zola lays to rest the past with an incredible metaphor for the once vibrant country life of Claude and Christine, calling it a cemetery of illusions. There is a strong literary antithesis when the parenting traits of Dubuche and Claude are compared. Dubuche, like many parents who have failed at their dreams in life, has turned to his children with remarkable devotion. Yet there is even an atmosphere of hopelessness there because of the children's frailties. The resulting feeling Zola leaves with the reader is that when Dubuche's wife and children are gone, he will be left totally empty.

As with everything in his life, Claude's reaction to their old country home is to run away. Just as he is unable to face certain realities about his art and his marriage, he cannot bear the changes he sees. Ironically, Claude can see what breaks his heart but is oblivious to what hurts other people, especially Christine.

Chapter 11, Part 2

Chapter 11, Part 2 Summary

Although Claude's nervousness diminishes the moment his foot steps down onto Paris soil, the dinner does not provide the cheerfulness Sandoz had hoped for. As with other things, Claude goes into a tirade about how the country place has changed and adds that it removes all hope of immortality. As usual, Claude turns everything into a discussion of art. He wonders if anything will ever change in the public's tastes or whether the artist's paradise is as non-existent as the Catholic's. He insists that he can only carry on by holding onto the illusion that one day he will be accepted and understood. The conversation leaves both of them wallowing in sentimental misery. As they walk along, they have a desire to go look in at one of their old places, the Café Baudequin. Although that place, too, had changed over the years, curiosity leads them to go peek in the window. To their surprise, Ganière is sitting there alone at their old table in the back. Unwilling to take on any more disturbing news, Sandoz and Claude hurry away without going in.

Sandoz purposes to get all the old friends together once again at a Thursday night dinner in his new house. The place is filled with antiques and artifacts from all over the world, an eclectic and old fashioned abode for a very modern writer. Henriette plans a special menu. Sandoz's latest novel has been a popular if not critical success. It is happening because of Sandoz's determination not to let anything stop him from fulfilling his avowed purpose in his writing. At least one critic appears to be coming around to his way of thinking. Claude and Christine are the first guests to arrive. Although Claude appears to be jovial and gregarious, he has moments of introspection when he stares off into space. Christiane constantly looks at Claude as though to see that everything is all right. As each of the other guests arrive, it is clear that they have all gone their separate ways and no longer have the affinity for one another as in the past. What was once a congenial group is now a hodge podge of contradictions.

After leaving the party, Claude wants Christine to go home while he takes care of some business. Christine is alarmed that he thinks he has business to attend to after midnight. After they part, Christine follows Claude realizing the idea that has popped into his mind. She watches in horror as he stands on the bridge until he finally steps back to return home. She has to run to get back to their house before he discovers that she was following him.

Chapter 11, Part 2 Analysis

Agnosticism enters the story line as Claude and Sandoz question the idea of immortality. Claude, insisting that he can carry on only so long as he can hold onto the illusion that he will one day be accepted and understood, represents the idea of innovation and public tastes. The overall tone of their conversation in the Paris café is

morose and places a pall of foreshadowed gloom over the story line. Even the usually upbeat Sandoz succumbs to the pessimistic attitude of Claude.

The picture of Ganière sitting alone in the café where the group of friends all used to meet is the symbol of shattered hopes and dreams. Even Fagerolles and Jory, who have sold out their original beliefs, are failures at creating a new idea about art. Ganière is the one whose diversified interests prevented him from working toward what he originally started out to do. Only Claude and Sandoz have remained dedicated to a new form of art.

In spite of the critics, Sandoz's novels begin to sell and he is able to move into better quarters with his wife, Henriette. At that point, Sandoz has the unrealistic idea that he can bring back the past by getting everyone together again for one of his Thursday evening dinners. After the disastrous trip to see Dubuche in the country, Sandoz still has the idealistic idea that everyone can be brought together again. The evening is a predictable catastrophe with the old friends blaming Claude for their collective failures. Christine is aware of a look in Claude's eyes that chills her. Later, Claude's standing on the bridge looking down into the Seine is an image of utter failure and despair.

Chapter 12, Part 1

Chapter 12, Part 1 Summary

Christine arrives home just before Claude at three in the morning and hurries to get under the covers so he will not suspect that she had been following him. When he lies down in the bed beside her, Christine recognizes a coldness that will never warm them again to come together in each other's arms. Hers is a kind of proud grief that she is making a supreme sacrifice so that Claude can finish his work. She fights to stay awake, aware that Claude is not sleeping, but exhaustion finally overtakes her and she dozes off. An hour later, she wakes to the realization that Claude is not in the bed with her. Her first fear is allayed when she notices a dim light under the door leading into Claude's studio. She realizes that Claude is trying to see his vision of the Ile de la Cité that he had been unable to see in the dark on the bridge. He is mechanically working on the painting like a madman with his brush in one hand and a candle in the other. Christine observes that Claude has gone back to his naked Woman. She tries to get him back to bed as she fights the mistress there on the canvas under her own roof. Claude demands that she leave him alone because he is working. Christine will not leave. Instead she tries to get him to see that the Woman in the painting is poisoning her life. Claude looks surprised like a man caught in an act of debauchery. He rebuffs Christine by saying he does not want to go away with her, he does not want to be happy, he only wants to paint. The Woman in the painting has taken on the appearance of an idol, gilded and bejeweled with a mystic rose at her sex under the canopy of her belly. As Christine points out the grotesqueness of his Woman, Claude seems to regain his senses for a moment. Claude admits that "the dreadful thought" was in his mind on the bridge but the unfinished painting kept him from following through. Christine feels that she has won as they return to bed and make passionate love for the first time in months. The next morning, however, Claude hears a voice calling him from the studio. Slipping out from under Christine's leg across his thighs, his mental response is, "Here I am! I'm coming."

Chapter 12, Part 1 Analysis

The tragedy, foreshadowed throughout the novel, is nearing. The conflict plays out on several levels. First, there is the inner conflict within Claude that renders him emotionally incapable of doing what he has the ability and imagination to do. Second, there is the conflict between the human Christine and her rival, the painted mistress. Claude the artist is a worshipper of his idealized image of what a woman is. For him, the flesh and blood association with his wife is not enough. Whatever he feels when he looks at a woman is his great desire to be able to put it down on canvas. Gradually, this Woman of his painting has become a goddess that, although he adores her he cannot represent her with his brush. His love is more than just Art and he has become so fixated with the Woman that he cannot feel anything like love for Christine who adores him or even to be in a state of happiness.

Christine finally finds the courage to confront Claude, to make him see what he has done with the grotesque painting of his Woman. She uses her body, her warmth, and her arms to drag him away from her rival. Claude seems to come to his senses, aghast at what he has painted. Christine falls asleep after their passionate love making secure in the idea that she has finally won out over the painted mistress. Madness, however, is not so easily conquered, as Claude awakes the next morning, hearing the painted Woman calling for him. The real tragedy in this story is not only Claude, it is the useless sacrifice of Christine's life.

The verbal imagery of this chapter is one of stark contrast in a dark studio with only the light of a candle illuminating Claude's painted idol. It has a film noir feeling about it that forebodes ultimate doom.

Chapter 12, Part 2

Chapter 12, Part 2 Summary

When Christine awakes to find Claude already out of bed. She rushes to the studio, at first seeing nothing, until looking up at the huge picture on the wall, she discovers Claude hanging from the ladder in front of his unfinished picture. He hangs there facing his Woman as though looking at her with sightless eyes. Christine is filled with the mixed emotions of horror, grief, and anger. She collapses where they find her, lying half dead on the floor.

Sandoz takes charge of all the arrangements and the day of the funeral sees a small gathering of people arrive. One of the relatives, a second cousin, appears to be a prominent businessman who walks directly behind the hearse on the way to the cemetery. A distant woman relative surveys the remains of Claude's studio, sniffs, and departs. Christine is in the hospital and unable to attend the funeral. Only Sandoz and Bongrand are there following the hearse as it makes its way along Paris streets. Sandoz tells Bongrand that he found nothing of Claude's that could be sold, thus leaving Christine penniless and seriously incapacitated from her shock. The two men discuss Claude's early work and agree they were extraordinary pieces. Sandoz comments that Claude had a brain filled with knowledge and the temperament of a great artist, yet he had left nothing to show. The cemetery, a new one, reminded Sandoz how Claude with his artist eye would have viewed it. He says that Claude was so keen on everything modern that he would have understood the place. When the conversation turns to Claude's Woman, Sandoz says to Bongrand, "It was she who strangled him." Sandoz suggests that it will take generations for artist and writers to work logically in the pure and lofty simplicity of truth."

There is the smell of burning rotten coffin boards coming from behind the trees lining one side of the cemetery giving off dusty clouds of smoke. Turning pale, Sandoz remarks, "It was inevitable. All our activity, our boastfulness about our knowledge was bound to lead us back again to doubt....We are not an end; we are a transition, the beginning only of something new." The sound of a passing train disturbs the reverence of the occasion. Sandoz comments as Claude is laid to rest that there is one, at least, who was both logical and brave as he admitted his impotence and did away with himself. The two men, Sandoz and Bongrand, note that it is eleven o'clock and time to go back to work.

Chapter 12, Part 2 Analysis

The last part of Chapter 12 sums up the tragedy of Claude who lacked the genius to accomplish what will take generations to bring to fruition. Claude was truly years ahead of his time. The monologues of Sandoz capsulize the hopes and failures not only of Claude but also of their entire group. Christine represents the tragedy of losing out to an

idea and being left with nothing through no fault of her own. The imagery of the cemetery, both hideous and beautiful at the same time, symbolizes the stark reality that the public has yet to come to grips with. That only Sandoz and Bongrand attend the funeral service points out the fickleness of friends that are unwilling to take responsibility for their own inadequacies. The two relatives who show up are a contrast in respect for the dead and personal greed. The final words of the chapter express the universally accepted that life goes on after death.

Characters

Claude Lantier

Claude is the central character of the novel, THE MASTERPIECE, who is the driving force behind a group of friends set on modernizing art and literature to deal with reality. He is a painter who has done some brilliant work that hints at a masterpiece one day coming from his talent. His main problem consists of self-doubt when he gets in front of his canvases. He has the vision but doubts his ability to put the vision down in the form of a masterpiece. Still, he is determined and firmly believes that the day will come when he accomplishes his goals. The group of friends all look to him as a kind of revolutionary guru who will lead them into the new age. Zola admits that he is a composite of some of the great artists of the 19th century living in Paris.

When Christine enters his life, it is the one and only time he ever loves a real woman. Even then, it takes a long time for him to overcome his innate suspicion of women. Initially, he believes that Christine is like the predatory models that he has known. When they finally consummate their love for each other, Claude is momentarily more man than artist, finding the only happiness he has ever experienced in his life. Yet the fervor of conjugal bliss wears thin when Christine becomes pregnant and cannot go with him when he ventures out of their country house in search of inspiration for his painting. After Jacques, their frail and odd-looking son is born, the rift between them widens and Claude once again feels the pull of Paris.

Claude is a good example of a bipolar personality. He is basically a kind man but frequently abusive toward Christine and totally indifferent to his son. His friends and the older artist Bongrand recognize his genius but his tragic flaw is that he can never satisfy himself.

Pierre Sandoz

He is the more or less autobiographical counterpoint of Émile Zola himself. He is the eternal optimist and at the beginning believes that his group of friends will all succeed at their goals in various artistic fields. He has a regular Thursday evening dinner at his home which he shares with an invalid mother. The purpose of these gatherings is to discuss the new art and what each is doing in his own field. Although the gatherings are at his place, only Claude is the undisputed leader of the group. His forte is writing and he is determined to write novels that reflect life as it actually is, however he is regularly panned by the critics. Sandoz's strength lies in the fact that he refuses to be intimidated by the critics. He is working on a magnum opus, a series of books with one continuous story line and theme.

Sandoz eventually finds success and realizes that it is not the sweet smelling conclusion to hard work that he and Claude often imagined it would be. Of all Claude's

friends, Sandoz is the one who recognizes the constant turmoil going on inside Claude, and he tries to protect his friend whenever he can. Sandoz recognizes Christine's unhappiness and fear. Her discomfort serves to bring him around to see Claude more often. He and Claude often discuss their school years, dragging up the past as though nothing has changed in their lives. Believing it will do Claude good, he persuades him to return to Bennecourt and the countryside where he and Christine had their only truly happy days. Reluctantly Claude accompanies Sandoz, but the outing eventually brings both of them down.

In the end, at Claude's funeral, Sandoz sums up the reality of how difficult it is to introduce new ideas into a culture comfortable with its past. He and Bongrand, the only two of Claude's friends who attend the funeral, talk about Claude's talent and the sad fact that there is nothing left to show for it. Sandoz recognizes that the Woman in Claude's painting had strangled him. Understanding that success is fickle and fleeting, Sandoz parts company with Bongrand to return to his work.

Louis Dubuche

His field is architecture and he is a student at the École des Beaux-Arts, which is a school that is disparaged by the group for its insistence on imitating the classics and its outright rejection of anything new. His being in the Beaux-Arts is tolerated by the rest of the group because that is the only place available to study architecture. Dubuche's failing is that he gets caught up in ambition and formulates a relationship with the stone mason builder, Margaillan. One of the original group of three friends from Plassans, he quickly gets caught up in the idea of being in society and is the first to desert. His promise of success however, results in failure and he is reduced to becoming a nursemaid to his two sickly children and an invalid wife.

Malgras

He is a rather scruffy art dealer who knows nothing about art but has an eye for a piece that will turn a profit. Ever the crafty businessman, he manages to get excellent paintings from Claude and other artists at ridiculously low prices. He has a sense of when an artist needs money desperately and a way of feigning disinterest in the very paintings he ends up buying. He finally makes enough money to retire to his dream country place.

Henri Fagerolles

A true child of the Paris streets, he joined the group of radical thinkers led by Claude Lantier. He is a young man who has great ideas about reality in art but is willing to compromise with the Beaux-Arts in order to further his career. He is notably two faced as he makes disparaging statements about the establishment all the while struggling to get into it. There is a certain sense of guilt about him however, as he recognizes how much he owes to Claude and the others for their influence. This feeling of guilt causes

him to use his influence to get Claude's painting, The Dead Boy, into the Salon. Enamored by money and position, he allows himself to be used by Irma Bécot, a successful courtesan, known throughout Paris for her palatial mansion and fine clothes.

Ganière

He is another acquaintance of Sandoz and Claude who joins up with the group of friends who meet regularly at a popular café and stroll around Paris as though they owned the city. He joins in the criticism usually initiated by Claude over the condition of art, architecture, and literature of the day. By virtue of having the wherewithal to do so, he is a student at the Beaux-Arts. His ability as an artist is, however, minimal though Claude tries to encourage him every chance he gets. His failing, however, comes from divided interest. His real love is music, though he never studied music when he was younger. When the others talk about art, he wants to discuss the last concert he attended. He eventually marries the old maid that he visits for music lessons.

Chaîne

Also from the area around Plassans, he was a shepherd who gained a reputation for himself as a wood carver. He was sponsored to come to Paris and study at the Beaux-Arts, but was unsuccessful. Reduced to poverty, he shares a studio with Mahoudeau where they both live and share the same bed. He makes an attempt to become an artist and produces three moderately interesting canvases. His disappointment is that he never studied at the Beaux-Arts to become the artist he imagined himself to be. In the end, he is a carnival barker making a modest living and drawing his customers by a display of his three paintings.

Mahoudeau

Another of the rebel group of young artists, Mahoudeau is a sculptor whose work is largely overlooked by the Parisians. Reduced to poverty, he lives in deplorable conditions and bitter cold in the wintertime. His great masterpiece he calls the Bathing Woman begins to melt and crumble in his studio when he lights a fire to take the chill off the room. He later manages to salvage enough of the work to reduce it to an image of a young girl instead of a woman. Symbolically, the new sculpture represents his achievement as being less than his ability. Like many of the others, he eventually blames his failures on Claude.

Irma Bécot

Described by Claude the first time he sees her as a trollop, she manages to become one of the foremost courtesans of Paris. She develops a deep seated need to exact revenge on Claude for a time when he spurned her as a nude model in his studio. Years later she gets her chance and seduces him into a one night stand when Claude is at

one of his low points. The next morning she makes it quite clear that it will be the last time he is every allowed into her bed. She builds herself a great mansion just across the way from a more modest mansion owned by Fagerolles whom she uses shamelessly, causing him to go deeply into debt.

Bongrand

He is an older man, an artist of note in Paris, who painted a picture known as The Village Wedding that is now hanging in the Luxembourg Museum. He has moved on in his painting toward more realism and away from the lyrical. He detests his painting that everyone else loves because it is something from his past and has no bearing on the work he now does. Because he is independently wealthy, he is free to follow the dictates of his own mind. He recognizes the genius in Claude and tries to encourage him to do his own thing and forget the Salon. While Claude is an admirer of his work, he never listens to the advice given him by the older, wiser artist.

Christine

She is a tragic figure of a girl who sacrifices her modesty and her life for love of Claude. She is a practical girl in every respect except for her blind adoration of Claude. Unwilling to be apart from him, she does the unthinkable for a young woman of her social status and moves in with Claude. Gradually, after they have lived in the country for several years apart from Paris, she recognizes his need to be in the city working on his art. Unwittingly, her encouragement of him to return to Paris opens the way for the complete deterioration of her marriage. There is never a time however, that her deep love for Claude falters, even after she comes to the realization that Art and not another woman is her rival for his affection.

Jacques

He is the son of Claude and Christine. He is a frail child from birth and has a noticeably large head. He is the epitome of the neglected child with a mother who lacks maternal instincts and constantly represses the boy in favor of her husband. Becoming ill, his parents fail to see the seriousness of his condition and chalk it up to growing pains. It is failure to thrive that causes the poor little boy to fall asleep one night and never wake up. Claude's subsequent painting of him becomes the ignoble picture of the Dead Child which Fagerolles manages to get entered into the Salon.

Delacroix

He is a prominent artist of the time when THE MASTERPIECE takes place in the mid to later 19th century. Although he does not appear in the novel, he is referred to several times as an art innovator whose work is now passè.

Mathilde

She is a woman who is somewhat repugnant, reeking of the herbs and spices in her husband's shop. Unable to have her passions taken care of at home, she becomes the paramour of Mahoudeau, Chaîne, and Jory. After her husband dies, Mathilde becomes religious possibly to prevent the locals in her neighborhood from gossiping about her affairs. Eventually, she becomes the wife of Jory and puts on an aura of respectability, though the aroma of herbs still lingers about her person.,

Henriette

She becomes Pierre Sandoz's wife and helps create a very comfortable and domestic atmosphere for her writer husband. She takes over the care of Pierre's mother. She is an outstanding cook and prefers to prepare meals herself rather than have the maid cook for them. She is the character in the novel who understands and accepts Christine. Interestingly, Émile Zola's wife considered herself to be the model for this character in THE MASTERPIECE.

Margaillan

He is the common man who, by hard work and clever business dealings, has become one of the foremost builders in Paris. He selects Dubuche as a husband for his invalid daughter because he thinks the young man will be an asset to his business. When Dubuche fails at his attempts as an architect, he relegates his son-in-law to the country where his only duties are to care for his wife and frail children.

Madame Vanzade

She is the elderly, invalid woman Christine comes to work for. She is very kind and generous and Christine becomes quite fond of her. However, after Christine leaves her to move in with Claude, the old woman does not provide for Christine in her will as she does for her other loyal servants. She never enters into the action of the novel except through the comments made about her by Christine and Claude.

Madame Joseph

She is the concierge in the building where Claude lives at the beginning of the novel. She does small favors for Claude but he will not allow her to sweep out his attic apartment and studio for fear that the dust she raises might settle on his wet painting.

Chambouvard

He is a well-known sculptor who represents the snobbery of the art community in Paris. He is held in high esteem by the Beaux-Arts and the general public. He firmly believes that every piece he turns out is a masterpiece and looks down on other artists, especially the young ones like Claude and Mahoudeau who are coming along with radical ideas.

Duquersonnière

He is a powerful Paris architect who becomes the tutor of Dubuche. He likes Dubuche, not for his great ability, but for his docile and plodding nature. He would have allowed Dubuche to work for him, but the young budding architect wanted a quicker way to the top.

Objects/Places

Fans

These are items that Christine's mother used to paint to make a small income to support her and her daughter. Christine used to help by painting in the backgrounds on them.

Open Air

It is the name of Claude's first attempt at a masterpiece as well as the name he applies to his new school of art theory.

Rags

Ridiculous practical jokes Claude and Sandoz used to play on people when they were schoolboys in Plassans.

École des Beaux-Arts

This is the Paris institution that is so despised by Claude and his group of followers although each of them has a desire to be included in the annual Salon exhibition.

Café Baudequin

This is the regular meeting place for the young rebels who thought they owned Paris and would have an enormous impact on Art.

Pont des Saints-Pères

This is the spot where Claude gets his inspiration for what he believes will be his illusive masterpiece.

Salon des Refusés

It is the site for the exhibition of artworks rejected by the Selection Committee for the annual Salon. It is where Claude's painting, Open Air, is exhibited and ridiculed by the public.

Ile de la Cité

It is the very heart of Paris and becomes the focal point of Claude's last attempt at painting his masterpiece.

Duquersonnière's Studio

This is where Dubuche studies with a tutor and prepares his entry for the Salon. When Claude goes there looking for Dubuche, he is treated disrespectfully because of his reputation as a rebel in the art world.

The signboard, Fruit and Vegetables

This is over the door of Mahoudeau's studio which he never got around to painting over after he rented the place.

The Rosette of the Legion of Honor

Bongrand wears this in his lapel, which is the French recognition for his position in the world of art.

Village Wedding

This is Bongrand's painting which made him a household name in Paris years ago.

Clermont

Christine grew up in this small city where she moved into the convent after the death of her mother.

Plassans

Sandoz, Claude, and Dubuche were school chums here before they met up again as young men living in Paris.

Bennecourt

It is the place in the countryside where Claude and Christine had had years of happiness.

La Richaudière

This is the country estate belonging to Dubuche's father-in-law, Margaillan.

The Last Rose

Christine takes this from the garden as the family leaves the country to return to Paris.

Baccy

This is the term that Chaîne and Mahoudeau use for pipe tobacco.

Titian Image

Irma Bécot is given this sobriquet to describe the effect she has whenever she puts in an appearance in public.

The Terrible Thought

Christine and Claude use this euphemism when they cannot bring themselves to mention suicide.

Themes

Antithesis

The theme of antithesis runs throughout the novel. In particular, it is seen in the character of Claude who detests the old classical painting but finds a strain of lyricism and romanticism still running through his veins. With Christine, it involves her repugnance at Claude's female nudes and her determination to be his model in order to work her way into his heart. It reoccurs frequently in the circumstance of how Claude and Sandoz prefer nature to urbanity but are inexplicably drawn to Paris. There is antithesis in Claude's feelings about women. On the one hand he has little use for them except as models, but on the other hand he adores the paintings and sketches he has done of models he quickly ushers out of his studio. In his low moments, Claude turns against painting as a false mistress while he is tortured by the knowledge that he still loves her. The theme reappears in Fagerolles who makes disparaging remarks about the art coming from Beaux-Arts while he secretly craves winning the Prix de Rome. Bongrand represents the opposite sides of success where the glory of recognition is followed by the effort to keep from failure after that. Claude feels the need to guard against talking of his passion for art with the woman he suddenly has a physical passion for. Claude, in his bouts of depression, struggles to make his next brush stroke while at the same time, he tries to make bold resolutions. The way Claude and Fagerolles see the painting Claude calls Open Air after the public ridicules the work is antithetical. Claude sees it as his greatest failure while Fagerolles insists that he has established a new school. The theme is expressed by the Classical revival in architecture that might be architectural jewels but could never house modern democracy. The theme is also what makes Claude such a tragic figure—even in his greatest despondency "he was never completely unconscious of genius." It is symbolized in Claude's mixed feeling of vanity and remorse after his night in the bed of Irma Bécot. It is perhaps most strongly stated when Sandoz says, "We've stopped believing in God, but not in our own immortality."

Fame and Fortune

Unabashedly, it is fame that motivates the group of rebels, especially Claude and Sandoz. More than money, they crave recognition for their particular kinds of genius. Sandoz sees it as a reward for hours of hard work, struggling for an hour over one sentence until it comes out just right. Claude sees Fame as recognition for his genius, acceptance of his contribution to art. It is that need for Fame and recognition that causes him the greatest pain when his paintings are passed over by the Committee or ridiculed by the public as they did when viewing the painting, Open Air. Still more painful to Claude, however, is when he is completely ignored as when the Dead Child is hung so high that no one even bothers to look up at it. Belatedly, he realizes that even ridicule is a kind of recognition that he might have turned to his advantage instead of destroying his painting. Fortune means more to Fagerolles and Dubuche who desert the group to

attempt working their way into Society. In the end, however, Fortune turns on both of them because the paths they used to achieve Fortune eventually became dead end roads. After years of hard work as Sandoz begins to receive a certain amount of Fame, he finds, like Bongrand, that it is not all it is chalked up to be. There is a kind of ambivalence in Claude about the Fortune that comes with Fame. Deciding that his latest painting will be a critical and popular success, he goes into his capital for daily living expenses, convinced that this one painting will start bringing in income. Even the usually conservative Christine agrees for a time. In Bongrand and Delacroix, who died without a single student, Zola paints the inevitable fleeting nature of Fame. In the downfalls of Fagerolles and Dubuche the same insubstantial nature of Fortune also appear. The conclusion seems to be that Fame is circumstantial and Fortune is a neverending struggle as illustrated in the last line of the novel, "Back to work!"

Change

The thrust of Claude's ambition is to bring reality to painting as opposed to the stylized and romantic art of the past that lingers to the present day. In the beginning, the whole group of friends who meet together regularly have the same aspirations and conceit to believe that they will make a difference in their individual fields. Sandoz aspires to make literature realistic, to call things by their common names and to show life as it really is. In contrast to Claude, Sandoz never allows himself to be defeated by discouragement or failure. Claude on the other hand has the tragic flaw of being unable to sustain belief in himself, which, in his lowest moments, renders him impotent. As for Fagerolles and Dubuche, material gain becomes an irresistible lure even as they delude themselves into thinking they are still on the verge of causing artistic revolution. Chaîne lacks the talent to affect change. He is a small fish in an ocean unlike the big fish he was in the pond of the village. Ganière is hampered by a lack of artistic talent and the problem of ambivalence. When he attempts to incorporate Claude's revolutionary ideas, his paintings come out muddled and bland. In reality, he is not sure he made the right decisions early on and has developed a passion for music too late in his life to be a participant. Christine represents sacrificial change. Her repugnance at Claude's nudes, most especially the ones she poses for, is artificially changed to a kind of grudging admiration for the man she loves so deeply. Bongrand represents the futility of trying to change once his art has been pigeonholed. After the success of "Village Wedding," the public does not allow for any deviation from what it perceives as his genre. That change is inevitable (and not always for the better) is illustrated in the differences Claude finds upon returning to his former country home. The change there has removed all the charm he once felt for the area, though just how much of that is actual change and how much is in his own perception is not clear. The final blow of the theme of change occurs when Christine is unable to win Claude back from the idolized Woman in his last painting and Claude, unable to change, kills himself.

Style

Point of View

Émile Zola writes from the omniscient point of view, concentrating heavily on what goes on in the minds of Claude, Sandoz, and Christine. From the point of view expressed by examining the character of Claude, the reader is shown personality conflict as a tragic flaw. Examining Claude through his thoughts and his actions, the reader sees almost at once a great character with an almost classic character flaw. Skillfully, Zola is able to sustain interest in Claude by the hope against hope that he will finally succeed. In Sandoz, the reader learns the philosophy behind the need for change in the arts. Zola paints Sandoz as thoughtful and observant. If Sandoz has a flaw, it is his usual optimism and the naïve idea that there is hope to get the group of friends back to where they began. Looking at Christine, the reader sees the struggles of a woman in love who is painfully aware that her husband is drifting away from her. Zola does a skillful job of looking into the psyche of a woman, something many male writers fail to do. Christine is not a one-dimensional character in the novel. There is both goodness and compromising determination about her. It comes as little surprise to the reader that Claude's suicide contributes to the destruction of Christine as well. In the more minor characters, Zola looks at aspects such as avarice, revenge, snobbery, and the like. His omniscient viewpoint allows for looking at each of the characters objectively where it is possible to see the good and the bad that resides in every human being.

Setting

Zola's novel, THE MASTERPIECE, is set in the mesmerizing city of Paris and the long tradition of its being the center of art and culture. He brings the city alive with an almost travel guide accuracy and description. More than the places, however, Zola has a firm grasp of the public feelings of the day. His association in real life with the likes of such noted artists as Cézanne, Monet, and Manet, makes it possible for him to draw the settings of Claude's various art studios with clarity and believability. His deviation from the streets of Paris into the countryside is equally exact, painted with word pictures that bring to life the hills, rivers, vegetation, and population of those areas. In the end, however, it is Paris that pulls the characters together and Paris that ultimately destroys their former cohesiveness.

Language and Meaning

Émile Zola is a master of simile and metaphor to color his descriptions and make clear his meaning. While the vocabulary is generally simple, the richness of the way he puts the words together makes for compelling reading. There is never any ambiguity in Zola's meaning as his narrative unfolds. Some of his descriptions at first glance seem to be long and drawn out, but upon reading them the reader is almost left wishing there were

more. Zola even manages to incorporate smells into his writing that are so vivid the reader can almost get their scent. His descriptive passages about the various characters delve into their very core, giving a sense of actually knowing each individual, allowing the reader to make up his or her own mind whether the character is likable or not. Clever usage of words paint pictures not only of people, places, and things, but also of attitudes. For example when Fagerolles calls the Salon "a filthy old junk-shop where good painting went as mouldy (sic) as the bad." In all, the language is colorful without ostentation and skillfully draws the reader into the story in an early example of what is frequently called a page-turner. If there is anything lacking in the novel, it might be a scarcity of humor in a story that goes headlong into certain tragedy.

Structure

Zola organizes his story in twelve chapters of about equal length. Each chapter seems self-contained with a subtle unfolding of narrative that causes a reader to want more without any hint of the cliffhanger. Zola uses no notations with his chapters which are not even given a heading. The book is a straight forward narrative that might have appeared sensational in his day, but reads today like a modern novel. In that respect Zola has managed to create the realism his story proposes for literature and art. Although some of Zola's paragraphs tend to be long, he breaks them up with realistic dialog and shorter transitional paragraphs. If the novel lacks stingers at the end of each chapter to cause the reader to want to continue reading, the first sentence of the next chapter is sure to be an attention grabber. In other words, Zola has structured the narrative in such a way that it is both easy and stimulating to read.

Quotes

"There is nothing so unfathomable as the first remote awakening the heart and the senses" (Chapter 1, pg. 22.)

"Every time a teacher has wanted to impose a truth on me, I've been filled with revolt and defiance" (Chapter 2, pg. 37.)

"That's what is wrong with all of us, we're still wallowing in Romanticism. We dabbled in it too long when we were kids, and now we're in it up to the neck. What we need is a thorough scrubbing!" (Chapter 2, pg. 39.)

"His studio struck him as a place of horror where he could never bear to live again now that it housed the mutilated corpse of something he had loved" (Chapter 3, pg. 55.)

"Whenever they were together, fanfares cleared the way before them and they picked up Paris in one hand and put it calmly in their pocket" (Chapter 3, pg.64.)

He [Claude] was almost as inexperienced as she was; his knowledge of women he had gleaned from casual affairs, for he lived beyond the pale of reality, in a world where love was a romantic passion" (Chapter 4, pg. 90.)

"...his heart pounded in his breast as it might have done in the presence of a naked saint" (Chapter 4, pg. 107.)

"Wasn't it sheer stupidity to believe in the intelligence of the public?" (Chapter 5, pg. 121.)

"Now she was showing herself as she was meant to be, in spite of her long integrity, one of those physically, sensually passionate beings who are so profoundly disturbing once they are aroused from their dormant state of modesty" (Chapter 6, pg. 139-140.)

"It was familiarity breeding dreary contempt, making even eternal nature appear to grow old through over-contemplation of the same landscape" (Chapter 6, pg. 160.)

"Haven't I told you scores of times that you're always beginners, and the greatest satisfaction was not in being at the top, but in getting there, in the enjoyment you get our of scaling heights?" (Chapter 7, pg. 175.)

"The root of the trouble...is this: the general public loathes literature!" (Chapter 7, pg. 184.)

"Everyone talked about himself and finally lapsed into silence when he realized that no one was listening" (Chapter 7, pg. 187.)

"He was beginning to make her unhappy now, and his caresses were of the casual, mechanical kind a man bestows on women who have ceased to mean anything to him" (Chapter 8, pg. 203.)

"...they were in Paris, which meant malicious gossip, certain unavoidable contacts, and a host of other things which can make life unpleasant for a woman who lives with a man" (Chapter 8, pg. 214.)

"When women want to be models, they should never have children!" (Chapter 9, pg. 251.)

"A disparaging gesture was enough to indicate his train of thought—his inability to be the genius of his own artistic creed, his frustration at being the forerunner who sows the idea but cannot reap the glory, his despair at seeing himself robbed and despoiled by a gang of slapdash painters, a swarm of facile daubers without any conception of the concerted action" (Chapter 10, pg. 294.)

"It was as though he were afraid at the thought of seeing Bennecourt again and the Seine and the islands and all the countryside where his years of happiness had died and been buried" (Chapter 11, pg. 310.)

"The past was but the cemetery of our illusions: one simply stubbed one's toes on the gravestones" (Chapter 11, pg. 317.)

"The present century has cast so much light on so many things, but it was bound to end under the threat of another wave of darkness" (Chapter 12, pg. 359.)

Topics for Discussion

Identify a few of the similes and metaphors in THE MASTERPIECE and define how they add color and meaning to the narrative.

Explain how the character of Sandoz parallels the author, Émile Zola.

Define and discuss Zola's use of antithesis in the novel.

Explain how and why Christine overcomes her repugnance at Claude's painting.

Discuss the purpose of the character of Irma Bécot in the novel.

Identify the symbolism of the child, Jacques, as it relates to Claude and Christine.

Define Claude Lantier as a tragic character.

Identify a favorite quote from the novel and explain why it appeals to you.

Explain how Zola's descriptions of Paris make the city both mysterious and appealing.

Define and explain the symbolism of Ile de la Cité as it relates to Claude's final downfall.