

Therese Raquin Study Guide

Therese Raquin by Émile Zola

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Plot Summary

Thérèse Raquin is a story of the consequences faced by the lovers Thérèse and Laurent who murder Thérèse's husband Camille. The lovers conceal their crime and manage to escape the justice system, but find their own punishment in the course of their terrible marriage.

Thérèse comes to live with her sickly cousin Camille as a small child. His mother, Madame Raquin, subjects Thérèse to the same treatments as her precious son. When they are old enough, Thérèse and Camille marry. Camille insists that they move to the city. Madame Raquin purchases a dilapidated shop for her children in a disreputable part of town. Thérèse is resigned to her dull life with her disgusting husband. Camille finds a job and Madame Raquin helps Thérèse run the shop. On Thursdays, Madame Raquin entertains a few friends. Laurent, a childhood friend to the couple, starts visiting the family regularly. Laurent kisses Thérèse the first chance he gets alone with her, beginning a passionate love affair. To be together, Laurent takes time off work, and Thérèse pretends to have headaches to give her leave from the store. Their affair continues for months, until Laurent risks losing his job if he takes off any more time from work. Thérèse visits his tiny room one evening. They long for Camille to be gone so that they can be together. Laurent decides to kill Camille.

Thérèse, Camille, and Laurent take an outing where Laurent throws Camille from a boat. The party that rescues Thérèse and Laurent backs up the cover story for the police report. Laurent gets Madame Raquin's friend Michaud, a retired police commissioner, to help break the news of her son's death. When Camille's body arrives at the morgue, Laurent buries the crime along with the body. The lovers do not meet again, wanting to wait until they can be together openly. The Thursday gatherings continue. When Thérèse's mourning period is over, the couple succeeds in getting Madame Raquin to suggest that they marry. When Laurent's father refuses to give him any money, Madame Raquin signs her life savings over to her niece.

Starting with the wedding night, Thérèse and Laurent have a horrible marriage. The corpse of Camille seems to come between them. At first, they cannot stand to touch each other, but later, they try to drive away their horror with passion. Nothing eases their guilt. Madame Raquin becomes speechless and paralyzed, unaware her "children" are her son's murderers. However, she finds their crime out, but is unable to report them. Thérèse and Laurent have a violent marriage with no love, although the continuing Thursday friends never suspect their unhappiness. Finally, Thérèse and Laurent decide to kill each other. When each sees what the other plans, they drink the poison Laurent has planned to use on Thérèse. They both die, as Madame Raquin watches their punishment.



Chapters I-III

Chapters I-III Summary

Thérèse Raquin is a nineteenth century story of the illicit love between Thérèse and her husband's friend, Laurent. The lovers are driven to murder the husband, but when they get away with it, and eventually marry, their lives become a horror story.

Chapter One introduces the characters Thérèse, Camille, and Madame Raquin and their shop and apartments. The neglected haberdashery shop sits in a dangerous, damp alley, selling things like needles, ribbons, and fabrics. In the evenings, a young woman sits as if a fixed part of the shop. An old woman dozes at the counter next to her. A young man is with the ladies, reading or talking. At the end of the day, the three retire to their sparse apartments above the shop. The old woman bids her son and daughter-in-law goodnight. The husband goes to bed while the young lady looks out the window.

Chapter Two presents the history of the family. After owning a shop for twenty-five years, Madame Raquin settles in a small house near the Seine. Her son, Camille, has grown up in spite of one illness after another. Madame Raquin pampers him, and he is spoiled, though delicate and still somewhat sickly. She prevents Camille from receiving any real education. Camille does gain employment as a clerk. Madame Raquin becomes Thérèse's guardian when Thérèse's mother dies. Thérèse grows up with the same overbearing care that Camille receives, although she is healthy. Thérèse is delighted with newfound freedom in the country. Madame Raquin plans for Thérèse and Camille to marry each other. However, their companionship has no passion. One day, Thérèse beats Camille, forgetting her enforced placidity for a moment. When Thérèse and Camille finally marry, life does not change much.

In Chapter Three, Camille decides that he is too bored in the country. He insists they move to Paris. At first Madame Raquin is upset, but she finally relents and even finds a place for the family. She realizes that her income may not support a growing family, and decides to help Thérèse run a shop. Without consulting Thérèse, or allowing Thérèse and Camille to see their potential home, Madame Raquin buys an inexpensive shop in a dodgy part of town. Madame Raquin convinces herself and her children that the shop and apartments are palatial. When Thérèse sees the shop, she is frozen with disappointment. Madame Raquin defends her purchase, and Camille discounts it, assuming he will be there very little anyway, once he finds a job. Thérèse resists fixing up the place or decorating it, she is so resigned to the horror she finds in her fate. Camille eventually finds a job with the Orleans Railway. Although the walk to and from work is long, Camille finds amusement and entertainment. When he returns from work, he reads, thinking he is educating himself. He shares his readings with Thérèse, who remains silent. Thérèse does not help with the shop much. Madame Raquin retains the few customers the shop attracts. This regular routine of life continues for three years.



Chapters I-III Analysis

The story opens with the state of life in a dreary shop owned by Thérèse Raquin. Her husband is a sickly, spoiled man. Her aunt (who is also her mother-in-law) is a placid old woman. Thérèse is restless. Funeral imagery that continues throughout the novel begins in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the reader learns the history of the family, where Thérèse has grown up in the pleasant atmosphere of the country, but under the influences of the same treatments her sickly cousin receives. Madame Raquin is determined for Thérèse to marry Camille so that he will have someone to care for him after she dies. Thérèse resigns herself to her unpleasant marriage and environment in the shop. Though Madame Raquin has grand dreams about the shop she finds, when they are confronted with the reality of the shop, she feels embarrassed. However, Camille minimizes the state of the shop, expecting to be gone at work all day anyway, and noting that Thérèse and his mother have each other for company.



Chapters IV - VI

Chapters IV - VI Summary

The Raquin family entertains friends on Thursday evenings. Madame Raquin runs into an old friend, Michaud, former commissary of police, who lived in the same house as her in Vernon. Michaud brings his son Oliver, and Oliver's sickly wife, Suzanne, to join them. Camille invites his boss, Grivet. The gathering includes dominoes and tea. Thérèse rushes to help any customers downstairs announced by the tinkling of a loud bell and takes her time returning to the company.

In Chapter five, Camille invites his childhood friend, Laurent, to join the Thursday gatherings. Thérèse is curious about the newcomer. Laurent remembers Thérèse, who feels embarrassed when he looks at her. Laurent tells about going to law school, but spends his time and his father's money painting. Laurent's father quits assisting him when he finds out, and since Laurent cannot make a living as a painter, he finds work. He is simply too gluttonous to live the life of a painter. Thérèse watches Laurent earnestly as he talks about painting and his models. Laurent offers to paint Camille's portrait. Laurent wins the friendship of the regular Thursday guests. Thérèse does not leave the party when customers arrive in the shop.

Laurent begins coming to the Raquin's almost every evening. Thérèse watches while he paints Camille's portrait. As Laurent watches Thérèse watching him, he convinces himself to become Thérèse's lover. Laurent finally finishes the painting, which Camille loves, even though it is awful. Camille wants to celebrate the completion with champagne, and while he goes to get the bottles, Laurent is left alone with Thérèse. He looks at her, and then violently embraces her. Thérèse resists at first, but quickly gives in to his passionate kiss.

Chapters IV - VI Analysis

Thérèse hates the friendly gatherings her aunt and husband host each Thursday. She finds herself in a tomb, surrounded by paper dolls. That changes when Camille's childhood friend, Laurent, joins them. Thérèse is troubled by Laurent, but attracted to him anyway. Laurent is glad to find this family, which provides him with food and free entertainment, allowing him to stay away from his tiny room. Laurent would rather be idle. He even overcomes Grivet's dislike of him for rising in salary too quickly at the office. Laurent takes advantage of Camille's friendship and Madame Raquin's mothering, but only pretends to return their affections. He is just using them. Laurent, who has tried to become a painter, but does not want to suffer poverty for it, decides to paint Camille's portrait. The painting is a foreshadowing of Camille's fate: "Unintentionally, he had exaggerated his model's pale features, and Camille's face looked like the greenish mask of a drowned man." (Chap. 6, p. 34). Laurent notices Thérèse watching him and thinks about becoming her lover, weighing the pros and cons

and considering the possible consequences. He thinks it would be funny to use Thérèse to satisfy his lust, and correctly assumes that she will have him. When Laurent kisses Thérèse, their passionate embrace foreshadows the violence of their affair. He is violent and brutal with his excessive passion.



Chapters VII - IX

Chapters VII - IX Summary

Laurent and Thérèse begin their love affair as if they have been together for many years. Laurent asks for time off work for their meetings, and Thérèse explains to her aunt that she must go to bed for a headache. Thérèse tells Laurent about her miserable life. She takes little precaution in being discovered by her aunt, and this terrifies Laurent. Once, when Madame Raquin does come upstairs to check on Thérèse, Thérèse proves that they are not in danger of being discovered. Laurent hides while Thérèse pretends to be asleep and asks Madame Raquin if she can rest just a little longer.

Laurent continues to take advantage of Madame Raquin's hospitality and Camille's friendship almost every evening. The lovers act as if they hate each other in the presence of Camille and his mother. Thérèse delights in deceiving Madame Raquin and Camille, who have taught her hypocrisy her whole life. During their evenings together, Thérèse boldly kisses Laurent anytime Madame Raquin and Camille leave the room. She is even bolder on the Thursday evening gatherings when everyone's back is turned. As they continue like this for months, Laurent's only fear is that his "delightful existence" will come to an end.

In Chapter Nine, Laurent's boss forbids him to take any more time off work. Laurent must face Thérèse's hostile disappointment for missing their appointed rendezvous. He finally tells her that he will lose his job if he misses any more work. During this time, Laurent and Thérèse's passion for each other increases. Finally Thérèse sends him a letter, asking him to stay home the following evening. Thérèse invents an excuse and goes to Laurent's room. When it is time for her to go, Thérèse explains that she has no pretext to come to him again. The couple despairs at having to part without a plan to be together again. Laurent wishes aloud that Camille was gone so that Laurent and Thérèse could marry. They discuss that if Camille has an accident, all their dreams could come true. Thérèse mentions that it is dangerous to plan an accident for Camille. Laurent tells Thérèse to remember him, even if they must go without seeing each other for several months. He says he will arrange things. When Thérèse leaves, Laurent lays alone thinking about murdering Camille. He thinks about the pros and cons of such an action. He dreams about the life he could have as Thérèse's husband. With Thérèse and Madame Raquin's money, he could remain idle until his father died. He thinks about ways he could kill Camille, and resolves to do it, but he does not want to do it in a way that would incriminate him. When Thérèse returns home, she continues to deceive her family, and tries to sleep as far away from her repugnant husband as possible.



Chapters VII - IX Analysis

Though Laurent finds his assumptions about using the Raquin family to satisfy all his needs correct, he suddenly finds Thérèse attractive and begins to fall in love with her. He does not care about hurting Camille or Madame Raquin. Thérèse finally has someone to listen to her woeful life as the adopted sibling and wife of sickly and arrogant Camille. She admits that she does not feel committed to her marriage to Camille. Thérèse and Laurent's passionate affair is almost brutal, including some images of imprisonment, foreshadowing their future relationship. Thérèse delights in her ability to deceive everyone, making her love Laurent even more while she pretends he is a dolt of a friend to her husband. Michaud, as a former police commissioner, tells stories of murder and robbery at the Thursday gatherings, providing more foreshadowing.

Laurent cannot leave work anymore or he will risk losing his job. Thérèse cannot reasonably leave the house and shop in the evenings, but she comes up with an excuse she can use for one more meeting with her lover. As she is trying to leave, the lovers realize it will have to be their last meeting. They cannot invent ways to be together, and although Laurent suggests it, Camille is not likely to take a trip alone. Thérèse mentions that Camille's death is the only way she can get away from him. She would run away with Laurent, despite the scandal, but Laurent does not want to face the sure poverty that would surely result.



Chapters X - XII

Chapters X - XII Summary

Laurent continues to come to the shop every day, but he and Thérèse do not have any more meetings. One Thursday, Michaud tells of a disturbing murder and admits that many crimes remain unsolved. The company argues about the implications of this admission. Grivet tells the story about a servant who goes to prison for stealing silver, but is later released when the silver is found in the nest of a magpie. Camille asks Michaud if there are murderers who remain free. Laurent and Thérèse stay quiet during this conversation.

In Chapter Eleven, Camille, Thérèse, and Laurent take a trip to Saint-Ouen. They find a clearing and rest there for a few hours. While Camille sleeps, Laurent risks discovery by kissing Thérèse's ankle. Laurent moves to crush Camille's face, but then walks away to the water. He thinks of a plan. Laurent suggests that they take a boat ride. While Camille gets into the boat, Laurent tells Thérèse his plan to throw Camille into the river. She hesitates, but ridicule from Camille helps her make up her mind. Laurent rows them to a deserted arm of the river, within earshot of another boating party. Laurent begins tickling Camille. When Camille protests, Laurent grabs harder. They struggle until Laurent finally raises Camille above his head. Camille bites Laurent's neck before falling into the river.

Laurent turns up his collar to hide his wound, then grabs Thérèse and capsizes the boat. He holds Thérèse and calls for help. The other boating party comes to rescue Laurent and Thérèse. Laurent looks in unlikely places for Camille. He says he regrets allowing Camille to dance on the boat. He describes Camille's request to save his wife. The boating party takes Laurent and Thérèse back to the restaurant. Thérèse begins to sob, and the restaurant owners put her to bed. Laurent returns alone to Paris to tell Madame Raquin the bad news.

In Chapter Twelve, Laurent asks Michaud to tell Madame Raquin about Camille's death. Michaud listens to Laurent's account of the story. He asks Laurent to wait while he, Oliver, and Suzanne go to Madame Raquin. Michaud breaks the news to Madame Raquin. Suzanne stays behind to look after the distraught, bereaved mother. Michaud and Oliver go with Laurent back to Saint-Ouen. Thérèse convinces everyone she is ill. Michaud, Oliver, and Laurent go back downstairs, where a policeman is taking an accident report. The boating party who has rescued Laurent and Thérèse describe the accident with such detail, that everyone believes they actually saw the event. When the newspapers describe the event, Laurent knows he has gotten away with the murder. Laurent encourages Thérèse to go home, and he, Michaud, and Oliver accompany her. Laurent surreptitiously holds Thérèse's hand. As she gets out of the cab, he whispers to her to be strong, and that they must wait. Alone again late that night, Laurent feels relieved that the matter is over, goes home and sleeps soundly.



Chapters X - XII Analysis

Thérèse and Laurent are forced to limit their outward affection to quick, rough hand holding behind a door. The talk often turns to murder at the Thursday gatherings, because of Michaud's past as police commissioner, and his son Oliver's role with the police. These horror stories frighten Grivet, but he seems to enjoy the sensationalism. Grivet seems especially horrified that he might meet a murderer on the way home. Oliver sneers at Grivet for his story, but Camille sticks up for his boss.

Chapter Eleven describes the occasional Sunday outings that Camille forces Thérèse to take with him. Madame Raquin accompanies her children for a short walk, and with ironic foreshadowing, always warns them to beware of accidents. Sometimes, Camille and Thérèse leave Paris for their outings. Thérèse enjoys these outings, which remind her of their old country house and her love of the Seine. Since Laurent becomes such a part of the family, he accompanies them on these outings. Camille enjoys showing off his wife, but Thérèse is miserable with her husband.

Laurent knows that it would be stupid to murder Camille unless it is in a way that he can escape punishment. Laurent wakes Camille by tickling him, which Camille enjoys. Thérèse is nervous, unaware of Laurent's plan. Thérèse struggles when she learns of the plan. At a look from Laurent, Thérèse agrees. Camille agrees reluctantly to get into the boat, but is terrified because he does not know how to swim.

After the murder, Laurent goes to Michaud because he feels that going straight to the policeman he knows will help protect him from suspicion. He is relieved that he does not have to go tell Madame Raquin, and looks at women and stuffs himself with pastries while he waits. Thérèse uses her training in deception to convince everyone that Camille simply fell out of the boat and drowned. When Laurent and Thérèse hold hands on the ride home, their fiery touch recalls the hands pressed together secretly at Thursday meetings and foreshadows their doomed future again.



Chapters XIII - XVI

Chapters XIII - XVI Summary

Laurent awakes in Chapter Thirteen without much memory of the previous day's murder. However, the bite Camille has given him pains him. He becomes a hero in the eyes of his coworkers. Laurent begins visiting the Morgue each day to look for Camille's corpse. One day Laurent notices a young woman looking at the corpse of a big man who died in a fall. Laurent becomes so disturbed by these visits, he resolves to go only twice more. But the next day, he is shocked to see Camille, whose body is quite degenerated. He tells himself, "This is what I have done. He is hideous" (Chap. 13). Laurent goes to tell Michaud, and Camille's death is finalized.

In Chapter Fourteen, the shop remains closed for three days while Thérèse and Madame Raquin mourn. Suzanne stays to help, and cannot get Thérèse to even turn over to look at her. However, on the third day, Thérèse suddenly gets up and goes to her aunt, pulling her out of grief-stricken senility. Both women seem older. The next day, they reopen the shop.

Laurent continues coming to the shop in Chapter Fifteen, consoling Madame Raquin. One Thursday, Michaud and Grivet both arrive to continue their old custom. When Madame Raquin bursts into tears, the guests encourage her to forget her pain, as Laurent and Thérèse watch silently.

In Chapter Sixteen, Laurent's role at the shop changes. Although it would be easy to meet now, Thérèse and Laurent do not even try to see each other in private. They explain away their negative feelings and look forward to the time when they can marry. Thérèse begins to be interested in life outside the shop and becomes infatuated with a young student nearby. She begins reading. She thinks equally of marrying Laurent and running away from him. Laurent goes back to his old ways, but softens a bit. He thinks about his future with Thérèse, planning to paint again and be idle. One Sunday, he visits his painter friend again, and embarks on an affair with the painter's model. They live together for many months, although Laurent knows little about her and does not love her.

Thérèse's mourning period ends. Laurent finds her lovely, but fears marrying such a nervous woman. He rationalizes that he must marry her. His model leaves him, so Laurent begins spending every day at the shop again. He asks Thérèse if she wants him to come to her that night. She suggests that they be prudent. Laurent counters that they have already waited more than a year. Thérèse finally suggests that they get married.



Chapters XIII - XVI Analysis

Laurent plays the distraught hero in Chapter Thirteen. He is worried that Camille's body has not been recovered. He begins to go to the morgue every day in hopes of recognizing his victim's body. He tortures himself trying to distinguish his victim in the horrible drowning victims. The morgue is an opportunity to make a commentary on the type of people who visit the morgue regularly as a source of free and sensational entertainment. The smell seems to follow Laurent home. Laurent feels that his crime is buried along with his victim.

Madame Raquin is distraught over the death of her son. The Thursday gatherings continue, a little uneasily. Madame Raquin has not been expecting them, but rushes to be the hostess, despite her despair. The friends selfishly want to continue their fun get-togethers, but they are cold and thoughtless toward Madame Raquin. Laurent is happy the gatherings continue, in order for him to have a pretext to see Thérèse. Laurent finds Thérèse even more beautiful than ever. However, the passion between Laurent and Thérèse seems to cool; they even find an accidental touch unpleasant, which should be a warning sign to them of things to come. Thérèse blossoms without the oppressive presence of Camille. She begins reading and matures. Laurent thinks of leaving Thérèse and forgetting about marrying her, but he convinces himself that he would have killed Camille for nothing. He also believes that he and his past lover share a bond that cannot be broken.



Chapters XVII - XIX

Chapters XVII - XIX Summary

The mention of marriage awakens Laurent's long-slumbering passions, but they are turned against him. He drinks late that night in a wine shop, to avoid being alone at home. His walk in the dark to his room that night terrifies him. He stays awake rationalizing the reasons for and against marrying Thérèse. He has insomnia, and when he does sleep, he experiences nightmares where he goes to Thérèse, but ends up in the arms of Camille's rotting corpse. Camille's bite bothers Laurent. He even imagines that Camille is shaking his bed. After a horrible night, he gets up for his day and realizes that if he had been with Thérèse, he would not have been afraid. He resolves to marry her as soon as possible. He examines the bite scar in the mirror, and finds it looking raw and purple. Laurent drags through his day and goes to the shop after work to find that Thérèse has had an awful night as well.

Chapter Eighteen describes Thérèse's difficult night and the new union of fear between Laurent and Thérèse. They plan to not mention marriage themselves, but to get Madame Raquin to suggest it. They both continue to have nightmares every night while they play their parts to achieve their plan. One night, Laurent stays under a bridge during a storm to avoid going home. He imagines a long line of drowned bodies as he watches the river. Laurent reasons and constantly reminds himself that marrying Thérèse will lead to happiness and an idle life.

In Chapter Nineteen, Thérèse starts acting very depressed around her aunt. Madame Raquin worries about her, and asks her friend Michaud what to do. He immediately suggests that she needs a husband. Madame Raquin does not want to let a stranger into her life. Laurent makes himself indispensable at the shop. He uses the memory of Camille to endear Madame Raquin. Michaud notices the attentions that Laurent pays to Thérèse (as part of the skillful act), and the old policeman promptly suggests to Madame Raquin that Laurent is the perfect husband for Thérèse. Madame Raquin is delighted with the suggestion of the man who has become a second son to her.

Michaud talks with Laurent and Madame Raquin talks with Thérèse until both young people agree to the marriage out of devotion and duty. The next day, the couple becomes formally engaged. Madame Raquin places Thérèse's hand in Laurent's, and they shiver. Their first public kiss makes them feel even more uncomfortable. When the announcement is made the following Thursday, Thérèse and Laurent continue to act like obliging friends. Laurent writes to his father for permission to marry. When Madame Raquin reads the response, she gives her fortune to her niece, depending on the couple for her maintenance the rest of her life, but providing the possibility that the couple could be happy.



Chapters XVII - XIX Analysis

When Laurent thinks about marrying Thérèse, he remembers the almost forgotten murder. Both Thérèse and Laurent begin to feel a terror regarding the murder as Camille's ghost visits them. They look forward to their marriage as a way to stop their fears. Laurent worries that his father will never die, and that even when he does, the old man will leave the inheritance to someone else. He hates his job and wants Thérèse's money to be able to live an idle life.

The lovers realize the best plan is to have Madame Raquin suggest their marriage. They set about achieving that goal. Madame Raquin resists Michaud's suggestion that Thérèse needs a husband at first, but she gradually accepts the idea. When Madame Raquin realizes how miserable life in the shop is with Thérèse in her current state, she decides that having Laurent as Thérèse's mate is a perfect solution. She fears having a stranger in the house in her old age. Michaud and Madame Raquin watch the potential couple that Thursday. Michaud leaves with Laurent and suggests the idea to him. Laurent pretends that he could not possibly marry Thérèse, who he thinks of as a sister. The old policeman thinks he is convincing Laurent, and gets Laurent to consent. Meanwhile, Madame Raquin talks with Thérèse, convincing her that it is not necessary to remain faithful to Camille's memory. Madame Raquin thinks she persuades Thérèse to agree to marry Laurent. Laurent's father's response to the request to get married is affirmative, but bitter.



Chapters XX - XXII

Chapters XX - XXII Summary

In Chapter Twenty, Thérèse and Laurent happily prepare for their wedding. Madame Raquin gives Laurent all her savings for wedding presents. Laurent's fine clothes bother the old wound from Camille's bite. The wedding party assembles at the shop. The wedding and feast are very serious and solemn. Grivet toasts to the couple's future offspring. The idea alarms Thérèse and Laurent. Thérèse and Laurent go back to their room. Laurent is bewildered to hear the announcement that his wife is ready for him.

Chapter Twenty-one describes Thérèse and Laurent's wedding night. Laurent comes into the bedroom, and Thérèse does not even turn to look at him. He kisses her bare shoulder, and Thérèse finds his touch repulsive. He sits in front of the fire across from her. Laurent finally tries to reminisce about their old times together and conjure the memory of their love. He mentions Camille's name, and it is like an invitation for the ghost to sit between them. The thwarted lovers become terrified. Laurent walks about the room and tries small talk to dispel the horror. Thérèse strives to maintain the conversation. However, they both continue to think of Camille, and even to have a subconscious conversation about their murder. Even in silence, they are really conversing about their victim.

Laurent begs Thérèse to kiss him. Thérèse presses her finger to his neck, asking about the wound she has never seen. The touch gives him excruciating pain, and he admits it is where Camille has bitten him. Thérèse refuses to kiss Laurent on the wound. Laurent forces her head against his neck, and when he finally releases her, she spits. Laurent realizes that Thérèse's kiss actually made the wound feel worse. Laurent believes he sees Camille, but it turns out to be the portrait he painted so long ago. Laurent asks Thérèse to take it down, but she is too afraid. Laurent also cannot allow himself to move the painting. They hear a scratching sound, which turns out to be the cat, Francois, but they are terrified. Laurent is convinced that Francois is going to avenge Camille's death. He wants to hurt the cat, but cannot do it. Thérèse and Laurent sit in the chairs in front of the fire until daylight. Laurent is calmer in the morning, and takes down Camille's portrait. Thérèse messes up the bed to deceive her aunt. Laurent chides Thérèse for being childish, hoping to have a better night next time.

In Chapter Twenty-two, the couple's nights get worse. Laurent blames Thérèse for his terrors. Thérèse wants to beg Camille's ghost for forgiveness. Laurent becomes brutal towards his wife. For the first few nights, the two cannot lie down together, and they stay in the chairs all night, talking of trivial matters. Camille's presence is still between them. They share no loving words or touches, day or night. After several days, they finally try to lay on the bed without undressing. After a few nights like this, they risk undressing and getting under the sheets. However, they maintain a broad space between them, which is occupied by their mutual hallucination of Camille's ghost. Laurent occasionally orders Thérèse to kiss him, but the ghost seems to be between them even then.



Laurent threatens Thérèse, wanting to end this childishness, wanting to stop Camille from coming in between them still.

Chapters XX - XXII Analysis

From the time the wedding preparations begin, Laurent and Thérèse both start feeling terrified about their murder and Camille's ghost. They look forward to their marriage to stop their nightmares. That morning they are joyful at the possibilities. Laurent's wound from Camille's bite bothers him all day. When the event finally comes, however, Thérèse and Laurent are amazed that they are finally married. They still act as if there is an obstacle between their love. Their passion for each other has died during their prudent wait for each other. Madame Raquin is glad that the wedding and feast are solemn. "To her mind, her son was there, invisible, entrusting Thérèse to Laurent." (Chap. 20, p. 111). Her health is starting to fail as well (she is carried to the wedding and feast), so a solemn celebration is fitting in her mind.

Thérèse worries that the jewelry dealer knows about Laurent's long ago secret visits. The bride and groom have a hard time accepting that they can be sweethearts in public now when everyone expects them to kiss. The two have not been lovers for more than two years. After their long wait, they find this moment of being alone with full acceptance very discomfoting. This awkwardness leads them to the desire to crush each other, redirecting the violent passion between them.

Laurent reminds Thérèse that they are free. However, when he speaks Camille's name, he invites the corpse into their lives for the rest of their marriage. The couple attempts to forget the murder with small talk, but there is a subtext in their dialogue, reliving the murder. Their horror grows as they realize that not only will their marriage not ease their horrors, but that they do not love each other anymore. Laurent thinks that if Thérèse kisses his wound, it will be healed and forgotten. However, he finds her touch worse than he could ever have imagined, and the brutality in achieving it sets a course for their relationship that will not be changed. Laurent and Thérèse do not speak any words of love to each other.

Madame Raquin was supposed to take the portrait of Camille down and take it to her room, but has forgotten. Laurent is afraid of the painting, but when he realizes it is his own work, he sees it for the first time as it really is. Laurent does not regret the murder at all. He blames his wife for their horrors. However, he also believes that Camille is jealous and is preventing him from loving Thérèse.



Chapters XXIII - XXV

Chapters XXIII - XXV Summary

Laurent decides on a new approach to drive Camille's specter from their bedroom in Chapter Twenty-three. He presses Thérèse close to him, as they consummate their marriage with violence and brutality. Thérèse bites Laurent's wound; Laurent throws her away because her touch is too painful there. Their violent embraces only produce more horrible hallucinations for them. They embark on a battle between kisses and the obligation to separate from the pain it causes them. Finally, Laurent and Thérèse sit back and cry, hearing Camille's triumph over them. They resolve that they cannot venture even small kisses in the future.

In the months after Camille's death, Michaud and Grivet worry that the Thursday gatherings would end. However, after Laurent and Thérèse marry, they resume their happiness and laughter at the regular gatherings, forgetting Camille completely. Thérèse now understands that the gatherings must continue, in order to prevent suspicion about Camille's death. Thérèse and Laurent both begin divided lives in which their days apart are calm and regular, but their nights shut up in their bedroom together are filled with terror and despair. They stay up chatting with Madame Raquin until late each night to avoid being imprisoned in the bedroom together. They begin to prefer Thursdays, when they have more to distract them.

As Madame Raquin's health fails, Thérèse and Laurent worry about what life will be like when she can no longer distract them from their terrors. Therefore, they go to tremendous lengths to care for Madame Raquin. The old woman is happy that she has brought the two together and given them all of her money, not worrying about the consequences of the paralysis at all. None of Laurent and Thérèse's acquaintances suspects the double lives they lead. Their friends joke on Thursdays about what a happy pair they seem to make.

In Chapter Twenty-five, Laurent decides to leave his job as a clerk. He tells Thérèse and Madame Raquin of his plans to take a studio and start painting again. Thérèse does not want to give him any money. Laurent makes her understand that if she does not consent, he will tell the police about their murder. Madame Raquin stands up for Laurent, and Thérèse decides to give him a little money to become an artist, as long as he uses the interest of their money and not the capital. Laurent gives his notice and takes a small studio and furnishes it with what he can on his limited means. He does not do anything in the studio but rest for the first two weeks. Laurent begins to feel the burden of idleness and begins to paint. He paints in the mornings, and walks around the city in the afternoons. One afternoon, he runs into his old college friend and brings him back to the studio. The friend is impressed with the studies that Laurent shows him. He says that the paintings all have a family resemblance, and after the friend leaves, Laurent realizes that they all look like Camille. He begins to draw. Every fresh attempt looks like Camille. He furiously smashes his canvas, convinced that he will not become



a great artist, because every face looks the same. He decides never to paint in the studio, so that it can remain a peaceful refuge for him.

Chapters XXIII - XXV Analysis

Laurent remembers that he had wanted Thérèse's kisses to cure him. Thérèse looks for oblivion in Laurent's embraces, one way or another. She thinks that if she can somehow rid Laurent of his wound, all will be well. They keep trying love, and it keeps being horrible for them, until they are worn out. They feel that Camille has won this battle, and resolve not to have any affection for one another going forward. Instead, the couple uses Madame Raquin and the Thursday friends to distract them from their terror. However, as Madame Raquin's health declines, they begin to worry about her ability to distract them.

Laurent remembers one of the logical reasons he uses when deciding to marry Thérèse. He wants to live an idle life and spend his time painting. If not for Thérèse's money and the shop, Laurent would have left her the first week. If he could steal all the money and leave, he would, but Madame Raquin legally protected her niece from this possibility when she gave them the money.

Laurent, however, obtains his dream of having a little studio and becoming a painter by threatening Thérèse to go to the police if she does not give him the money to do so. He spends the first two weeks just resting, but finally begins doing some studies. He refuses to let Thérèse come to the studio, afraid that she will bring Camille's ghost with her. His dream is ruined when he runs into his old artist friend from college. While the friend praises the work as better than anything Laurent ever achieved before, he notes that all the studies look alike. Laurent is horrified when he realizes they all look like Camille, and resolves never to paint in the studio again.



Chapters XXVI - XXVIII

Chapters XXVI - XXVIII Summary

In Chapter 26, Madame Raquin has a stroke and becomes completely paralyzed and speechless. Without Madam Raquin's chatter, the evenings become more and more cruel. Thérèse and Laurent attend to her needs, having to guess her wishes from her eyes alone. Madame Raquin stays in the dining room all day while Laurent goes to his studio and Thérèse goes downstairs to mind the store. Thérèse checks on her occasionally, but mostly Madame Raquin remains alone. The Thursday gatherings continue. Michaud and Grivet begin talking to Madame Raquin as they always do, but then answering for her. Grivet especially believes that he can read Madame Raquin's mind, although he is always wrong. One night Madame Raquin understands that Laurent and Thérèse have murdered Camille. Madame Raquin almost looks as if she would regain her abilities from the shock, but instead falls into despair. Laurent sees the change in her when he carries her to her bed and throws her on the bed.

In Chapter 27, Thérèse and Laurent worry that Madame Raquin will make the crime known. They argue about whether to let her be present for the Thursday gathering, but decide it is safest not to change anything from their normal routine. Madame Raquin raises her hand, a little at a time, and begins to trace words on the tablecloth. However, before she can incriminate the murderers, her fingers stiffen again, and she cannot finish the sentence. Grivet finishes the sentence by saying that Thérèse and Laurent have been very kind to Madame Raquin, which everyone believes, and the incident is forgotten.

In Chapter 28, Thérèse and Laurent begin to hate each other. They argue every evening over the smallest details, always bringing up each other's role in Camille's drowning. They exhaust themselves with the violence in order to be able to rest a little afterwards. Madame Raquin listens to their fights, learning all the details of the crime. Thérèse and Laurent never take Madame Raquin to her room to spare her these fights, afraid they will beat each other to death if she is not present. One night a complaint about the temperature of the water quickly leads to Thérèse sobbing about Camille's drowning in the river. She curses Laurent for killing Camille, but Laurent reminds her of her part. He urges her to remember that she hated Camille. Laurent threatens to tell the Public Prosecutor, as both of them refuse to take ownership for the crime. They continue to fight as Madame Raquin watches.

Chapters XXVI - XXVIII Analysis

Thérèse is actually the only one fairly good at determining the old woman's desires. Laurent feels a little sorry for Madame Raquin, but the truth is, she is very happy, being well taken care of in her last days by her doting children. Thérèse and Laurent do not care about Madame Raquin; they only care about the role she plays in keeping their



terror at bay with her trivial chatter. Madame Raquin is an actual corpse between them, although when her eyes are open, there is a remnant of life in her. Michaud and Grivet are embarrassed by Madame Raquin's condition. They decide the best course of action is to act like nothing has happened, giving them the freedom to be merry in front of her. Madame Raquin is happy. She does not suffer because she feels the final chapter of her life is wonderful to be in such considerate hands. Then she understands the truth about Thérèse and Laurent's relationship and that they murdered her son. The truth devastates her and fills her with hate. When Thérèse and Laurent realize that she knows, they worry she will somehow give them away at a Thursday gathering. She wants to kill her son's murderers, and she cries from the horror her life has become. Madame Raquin is overjoyed for a chance to ruin the murderers. Thérèse and Laurent almost confess to their friends themselves. Madame Raquin summons a tremendous effort to communicate to the friends, but only reinforces the mistaken belief that Thérèse and Laurent are the perfect couple.

The hate between Thérèse and Laurent is equal to their passionate love before the murder. Thérèse and Laurent fight whenever they are together. Laurent wants Thérèse to admit her share of responsibility to ease his own burden. Thérèse wants to claim innocence. But they both remember too well the details of exactly what happen. They only fight as a distraction from their guilt and terror.



Chapters XXIX - XXX

Chapters XXIX - XXX Summary

In Chapter 29, Thérèse becomes remorseful, crying to beg forgiveness of Camille. She confesses continuously to Madame Raquin, abusing herself and her helpless listener. Madame Raquin feels tortured by the displays of her niece. One day Thérèse kisses her aunt, and thinks that Madame Raquin displays a glimmer of forgiveness in her eyes. Thérèse feels rapture at this assumption. She feels disgust at kissing Madame Raquin's cold face, but she finds this another excellent remedy for her nerves. She continues to kiss Madame Raquin daily in this manner, believing that Madame Raquin forgives her.

Laurent forbids Thérèse to do this remorseful act in front of him. Thérèse tells him she is more peaceful now that she is repenting, and suggests he join her. Laurent calls her a hypocrite. Thérèse embraces Madame Raquin, who shuts her eyes. Laurent tells her to leave the poor old woman alone. He gets angry, but fails to get the desired reaction from Thérèse. Thérèse begins praising Camille and saying she loves him. Laurent reminds her how Camille disgusted her. However, Thérèse compares her two husbands, and Camille always comes out better. As they continue to argue, Laurent begins to beat Thérèse.

Chapters XXIX - XXX Analysis

Thérèse calculates a new approach against her terror. By pretending remorse, in such an extreme way, she finds some relief, or at least a way to exhaust herself. Thérèse feels disgust at kissing Madame Raquin's cold face, but she finds this another excellent remedy for her nerves. Thérèse feels rapture when she assumes Madame Raquin forgives her. However, Madame Raquin finds the crying sessions torturous. She hates Thérèse and her tears and kisses, knowing them to be the actions of a hypocrite. She is powerless to stop it. Laurent finds it unsettling that Thérèse has started taking responsibility for her part of the crime.



Chapters XXXI - XXXII

Chapters XXXI - XXXII Summary

Laurent begins watching Thérèse when they are separated during the day. He sees her dressed and acting like a street-walker. As Laurent follows her, he fears she is going to the police. Instead, she goes to a café, orders absinthe, and goes home with another man. Laurent is surprised, but not at all angry. That night, Laurent asks for more money. Thérèse refuses, and Laurent's reply lets her know that he knows what she's been doing. When the disagreement escalates, Laurent simply threatens to turn them in if she does not give him the money. They start to go to the police together, both tired of their horrible existence. However, then Thérèse decides to give him the money after all.

Laurent begins drinking, visiting prostitutes, and staying out all night. However, it brings him no relief, so he decides to stay at home to get used to the suffering. Thérèse also begins to despise her life of vice and stays home, neglecting her personal appearance as well as the house and shop. Thrown together again, Thérèse and Laurent begin fighting all day and all night. They begin repeating the threats of going to the police on a daily basis. The threats lead to constant spying on one another. They both become terrified that the other will confess at the Thursday gatherings. Thérèse and Laurent both decide to kill each other. This time, they forget the caution they have long exercised in concealing Camille's murder. Thérèse withdraws all the money, and Laurent is aware of where she has hidden it. Laurent runs into an old friend who is now a chemist and obtains a container of poison. Thérèse sharpens a large knife and hides it.

In Chapter XXXII, they have another Thursday gathering, which is especially pleasant. As the friends leave even later than usual, Oliver remarks on how honest Thérèse and Laurent seem and how it makes them all so comfortable. Suzanne tells Thérèse she will come in the morning, but Thérèse suggests she come later, since she has an appointment. When everyone leaves, the couple awkwardly awaits their nightly routine, which includes preparing some sugar-water for the night and putting Madame Raquin to bed. Laurent volunteers to prepare the water, while Thérèse attends to Madame Raquin. Thérèse retrieves the knife while Laurent puts the poison in the water. However, both see the intent of the other. Madame Raquin watches. Thérèse begins to cry as the couple understands the other's thought. She drinks half of the water and hands it to Laurent, who drinks the other half. They fall to the ground, Thérèse's mouth resting on Laurent's scar from Camille's bite. Madame Raquin watches the dead murderers until noon the next day.

Chapters XXXI - XXXII Analysis

When Laurent spies on his wife and realizes what she is doing in the day to distract herself from her terror, he is delighted that she has a lover and realizes he should get



one himself. Laurent decides to use this opportunity get more money so that he can use vice as a distraction as well. However, neither of them find a life of vice helpful. Cowardice prevents them from confessing to the police to end their suffering with just punishment. Both Thérèse and Laurent begin thinking of committing another crime to obtain their freedom. They have come to the logical conclusion that they should kill the other to obtain some peace.

The Thursday gatherings continue without any of the friends suspecting a thing. In fact, Oliver ironically remarks about the honesty of the couple and home. Madame Raquin has come to the realization that though she is incapable of bringing the murders to justice, they are being punished anyway. When Thérèse and Laurent see their mutual plans to kill each other, they are relieved and thankful. Mutual suicide becomes the obvious answer. Madame Raquin is delighted to watch as her son's murderers meet their ends.



Characters

Thérèse

Thérèse's mother dies when she is very young. Her father brings her to live with her aunt before dying himself a short while later. Thérèse learns to walk quietly and suppress her childish impulses in the house of her aunt and sickly cousin. She is subjected to the same medicines and treatments as Camille, although she is healthy and strong. She is allowed a little extra freedom when they move to Vernon. The country air agrees with her and she loves to go look at the river.

Madame Raquin always assumes that Thérèse and Camille will marry. Madame Raquin depends on Thérèse in this way to ensure that someone will continue to care for her son after she is gone. Once, Thérèse forgets herself and beats Camille when he teases her. However, for the most part, Thérèse resigns herself to her fate of a boring life with a disgusting, sickly, arrogant husband in a dreary shop in a part of town no one wants to visit.

When Laurent comes into their lives, however, she begins to have a spark of interest. He is so much manlier than her husband. When Laurent acts on the interest Thérèse shows in him, she gives in almost immediately. Laurent gives her an outlet for her passionate impulses, which she has never been allowed to display around Camille and his mother. Although she does not really wish Camille any harm, she is sorely disappointed when her affair with Laurent is threatened by the impossibility of their meeting any more. She presents the voice of reason in being cautious about getting rid of the obstacle. She knows that if they are punished for killing him, they will still not be able to be together.

After Camille's death, Thérèse changes. She begins to awaken in a way that mirrors Camille's own awakening when they first move to Paris. She realizes, too late, that she might have chosen a different life just by speaking up for herself. Her attempts to find equilibrium are fruitless, however. She looks forward to finding a companion in Laurent, instead of having to face her nightmares alone. When they can finally be together, and they realize the reality of their relationship will never be what they wished, she seeks different extreme emotions to overcome her terror regarding Camille. Thérèse responds to Laurent's violent embraces, hoping that his violence will end her terror if she cannot have the comfort usually provided by love and affection from one's mate. When that does not work, she becomes penitent, although with as much hypocrisy and acting as she has lived her whole life. She is grateful that he beats her, wanting to find oblivion in that violence.



Laurent

Laurent is the son of a rich man. He wants to live a life of idle luxury. His father sends him to law school, but Laurent lies about his schooling and instead wants to become a painter. However, he is not interested enough to live in poverty. When his father cuts off his funds, Laurent finds a job he can work until his father dies and he can inherit his money.

Laurent is coarse and common. He is a big brute, which Thérèse finds attractive after her sickly husband. He is also logical and rational. He thinks about the pros and cons of having an adulterous affair with Thérèse before he kisses her. He is not even attracted to her at first. He enjoys mooching off the Raquins, and it seems like using Thérèse for his lust would be cheaper than visiting prostitutes. However, once he begins the affair, he finds himself falling in love with her passion. She becomes more beautiful to him every day. He risks his job to be with her, but when it comes down to it, he plans to end the affair rather than lose his job and face poverty. Thérèse even suggests that they face scandal and just run away together, but Laurent is worried that he cannot make enough money for them both. He faces the possibility of killing Camille the same as he rationalized the affair with Thérèse. He thinks about the pros and cons and imagines the life he could have with Thérèse, once Camille is out of the way. He longs to be with her, but he also wants the money that Madame Raquin has invested, as well as the living from the store. He wants to take Camille's place.

Laurent's conscience never bothers him about the murder. He would kill Camille again, even after all of his suffering, because he has no regret. He blames Thérèse for their troubles after their marriage. In his mind, it is her fault that the ghost of Camille comes into their marriage. He finds the terror they face insufferable, but he does not seem to make the connection from that suffering to his guilt at throwing Camille in the water.

Madame Raquin

Madame Raquin pampers her son and feels proud of the way she has rescued him from death many times. She is so overbearing, she does not allow him to receive a proper education or even learn to swim. She subjects her niece to the same treatments as her sickly son, never considering Thérèse's wants or needs. She arranges for Thérèse to marry her son so that he will have someone to look after him the way she has after she dies.

However, when Camille gets old enough and insists that they move to Paris, she regrets losing her quiet country retirement life. She offers to help arrange the move. She buys a little bargain shop and builds it up to a castle in her mind and her descriptions to Thérèse and Camille. She is embarrassed when Camille and Thérèse find out the truth. But by then it is too late. She helps Thérèse with the shop, but in reality, Madame Raquin is the one who attracts the customers.



Madame Raquin is distraught when she finds out about Camille's death. She feels that all of her efforts to protect him were for nothing when he drowns. Her health, which has already been failing, takes a sharp decline. When Laurent and Thérèse want to marry after Thérèse's appropriate mourning period, they want Madame Raquin to believe it is her idea. When she first thinks of the possibility of Thérèse getting married, she is scared. She does not want a stranger in her home in her old age. Then she thinks of Laurent, who in her mind has been a steady friend and a good man. Madame Raquin is almost corpse herself after her stroke. When she loses her ability to move or speak, she is happy to have such a good old age. Thérèse and Laurent seem to dote on her. When she realizes that their charades are just to alleviate the terror and guilt they feel about Camille, she is horrified, but powerless to seek justice for her son's murder. She tries to tell, but her Thursday friends are so clueless they think she is trying to tell them what good care Thérèse and Laurent take with her, which everyone can see anyway. Madame Raquin finally realizes that her son's murderers are getting their punishment with their terrible marriage. She watches them both commit suicide with glee, stuck staring at them until noon the next day.

Camille

Camille is a sickly child. His mother pampers him, believing she has rescued him from death's grip many times. She does not allow him to play or learn to swim like other children. Because of this pampering, he grows into an arrogant man. He is still somewhat sickly and pale as well. He is uneducated because his mother fears for him too much to allow him to seek that education.

When Camille gets old enough to marry Thérèse, he insists that they move to Paris. He does not want his mother sheltering him anymore. He finds a job as a clerk. His reading and self-education is an awakening for him, but he forces Thérèse to listen. He enjoys taking her out on Sundays to show her off to his acquaintances. He is so self-absorbed that he does not even notice how miserable Thérèse is when they move to Paris. She has no interest in decorating or anything, but he assumes she will be fine with his mother for company.

Camille allows Laurent to talk him into the boat ride during their outing. When Laurent's tickles turn more aggressive, and Camille realizes what is happening, his last effort to save himself is to bite Laurent's neck. After his death, Camille continues to be a presence in the novel as the corpse of a drowned man that stays between Thérèse and Laurent.

Michaud

Old Michaud is a former police commissioner. He lived in the same building as Madame Raquin when she had her shop in Vernon before she retired. When she runs into him in Paris, she invites him to visit, beginning the habit of the Thursday gatherings. Michaud always shares his gruesome stories from his days as police commissioner at the



gatherings. Laurent uses him to protect himself when Camille drowns. Because Michaud does not suspect any foul play, Laurent is safe.

Michaud is selfish about the Thursday gatherings. For that one day a week, he has something merry to anticipate. When Camille dies, and later when Madame Raquin has her stroke, Michaud has some uncertainty about whether they can continue the happy routine of these gatherings. He somewhat imposes himself on the mourners, but in arranging the marriage between Thérèse and Laurent, he ensures the gatherings will continue. When Madame Raquin has her stroke, he acts like nothing has really happened to calm his uneasiness about what to say about her condition. Michaud continues in the false belief that Thérèse and Laurent are good to Madame Raquin to the end.

Grivet

Grivet is Camille's boss. After Madame Raquin invites Michaud to visit, Camille wants to include his boss as well. These gatherings are a regular duty for Grivet, but also provide an outlet in his dull life. He, along with others at Camille's workplace, proclaims Laurent a hero after Camille's drowning. Grivet believes, after Madame Raquin has her stroke, that he can understand her wishes with just a look at her eyes. However, he is always wrong.

Oliver

Oliver is Michaud's son. He also has a role with the police, and is a great talker, so he and his father often monopolize the conversations at the Thursday gatherings.

Suzanne

Suzanne is Oliver's meek wife. She seems like no more than an accessory to Thérèse, but she comes to appreciate Suzanne's companionship when things become rough after she marries Laurent. Suzanne often helps with the store when Thérèse starts living a life of debauchery to ignore her terror.

Francois

Francois is the Raquin's cat. Laurent becomes convinced that Camille has possessed Francois, and is brutal to the cat.

Artist friend

Laurent has a friend in college who becomes a painter. When he meets the friend and brings him to his studio, the friend remarks on the family resemblance between all of Laurent's drawings.



Objects/Places

Vernon

Madame Raquin has a haberdashery shop in Vernon and lives in the same building as Michaud. She retires after twenty-five years.

Country House by the Seine

When Madame Raquin retires and sells her shop, she rents a secluded house by the Seine and enjoys a quiet country life.

Passage du Pont-Neuf

The Passage du Pont-Neuf is a dark, damp, narrow alley. The people who live there use it, and not many others, except as a shortcut. It is the kind of place decent people do not visit.

The Haberdashery Shop

Madame Raquin buys a shop in a shady part of town to allow Camille to get a job in Paris. She plans for Thérèse to run the shop, and she and Thérèse both spend much of their time sitting at the counter. The apartment where the Raquin family lives and entertains their friends is upstairs.

Attic Room

Laurent has a cheap garret room in a hotel attic. It is tiny and oppressive, and he stays out late every night to avoid spending any time there.

Studio

When Laurent quits his job and threatens Thérèse to give him some money, he rents a little studio where he plans to paint. When his dreams for painting are ruined, he keeps the studio as a refuge from his imprisonment at the shop and apartments with Thérèse.

Camille's Portrait

Laurent offers to paint Camille's portrait when they are reunited. Camille's pale features are overdone, providing a foreshadowing of Camille's fate of drowning. The painting frightens Laurent on his wedding night, and he and Thérèse are both afraid to move it.



The next day he takes it down, but sees his art in its true light, as something not very good or flattering.

Morgue

Laurent goes to the morgue daily to look for Camille's corpse so that the death can be verified. Spectators visit the morgue as a source of free entertainment, enjoying it as much as the theatre. The corpses are laid out on grey slabs with a glass separating death from the spectators.

Bedroom

The room that Thérèse shares with Camille and later Laurent is one of two bedrooms in the apartment above the shop. While Thérèse is married to Camille, she lies in the bedroom as far away from her husband as possible, because she is disgusted with his sickly body. After Thérèse and Laurent's wedding, they go to the bedroom on their wedding night to discover that Camille's death has not opened the way for them to love in peace, as they had hoped. Camille's corpse comes between them, seeming to sit down in front of the fire with them, or even lay in the bed between them.

Dining Room

The dining room is the scene of the jovial Thursday gatherings at the Raquin's home. Upstairs from the shop, at first, Thérèse retreats from the gatherings to the shop any chance she gets, until Laurent joins the group. When the bitter punishment of the marriage between Thérèse and Laurent begins, it is also where they sit at night with Madame Raquin, avoiding going to the bedroom as long as possible. Later, the dining room is the scene of Thérèse and Laurent's constant fighting and where Madame Raquin learns of her caretakers' treachery.

Stoneware flagon

Laurent steals a small stoneware flagon that contains prussic acid from his pharmacist friend. The prussic acid is a powerful poison that will leave few traces to indicate the victim was poisoned. When Thérèse sees the flagon, she understands what Laurent has planned. She is grateful to end her life and her punishment, by drinking the poison, saving half of the mixture for Laurent.



Themes

Punishment

Although Thérèse and Laurent get away with the crime of murdering Camille, they do not escape punishment. However, the theme of punishment and different types of imprisonment appear throughout the novel. Thérèse finds her life with her aunt and sickly cousin a type of prison from early in her life. Though she has more freedom when they move to the country, she says that by then she was "already stupefied", so she could not even enjoy her freedom. Thérèse is so miserable in the prison of life with her adopted family, she thinks of throwing herself into the Seine. Her life changes when Laurent becomes her lover. Although her marriage to Camille is an obstacle to their love, she finally has an outlet for her passion. When the lovers get away with the murder of Camille, they escape suspicion and justice for the crime. They prudently wait until the time is right, so that they can be together and still escape punishment. However, when they start to think of being together, the specter of Camille awakens and begins to visit them, causing both Thérèse and Laurent terror and nightmares. Laurent becomes so afraid one night that he can barely get to his room. Both characters look forward to being comforted by the other accomplice. However, their marriage becomes their punishment.

The novel includes frequent imagery of chains and other types of imprisonment when describing the criminals. For example, when Laurent is getting ready for the wedding, his neck feels imprisoned in his shirt collar. There is a bond between them, as if they are joined together on a chain gang. This chain weighs them down and prevents the lovers from living a peaceful life. Camille's ghost sentences Thérèse and Laurent himself as their punishment is administered in the marriage. Their hatred for each other, their constant arguing, and the fighting and beatings all serve to punish the criminals for their crime. Thérèse and Laurent admit to being cowards. They threaten constantly to go to the police to confess and face punishment, but never succeed in doing so. Instead, they face "perpetual suffering" in their lives together, although never admitting to themselves that truth that their marriage was their punishment.

Even Madame Raquin suffers her own imprisonment when she suffers a stroke. When she finds out the truth about Thérèse and Laurent, she wants to report the murderers. However, her mind is imprisoned in a body that no longer works for her, so she is powerless to seek justice for her son's murder. Madame Raquin realizes the truth about Thérèse and Laurent's punishment, especially as she watches them drink the poison and die.

Passion and Violence

Thérèse, as the daughter of a gypsy, is a passionate girl, more than her aunt understands. However, her aunt scolds her so much and subjects her to the medicines,



treatments, and environment of a sickly child, that Thérèse's natural inclinations are suppressed. Thérèse learns to be a liar and a hypocrite since she is not allowed to express the natural passions of a young, healthy girl. She considers drowning herself in the Seine to escape. Instead, she resigns herself to her fate. When Laurent seduces her, however, she has an outlet for her passionate nature. Their love is so fierce that it can hardly be contained in the little bedroom above the store, although Thérèse, well trained in deception, is good at hiding her adultery. When their passion becomes thwarted, it turns to murder. Laurent and Camille struggle violently before Laurent throws Camille into the river. The passion between Thérèse and Laurent is instantly changed. The furtive hand handholding becomes fiery or icy. Every touch sears their skin like a branding iron.

Thérèse attempts other outlets for her passion. She decides to try remorse, spending hours crying and striking her chest. This act (for she does not actually feel sorry for her crime) gives her physical body the passionate stimulation it craves. When she tires of that outlet, she tries a life of debauchery, using drugs and sex to anesthetize her passion and her terror. Laurent also tries vice, although not until he gets the idea from Thérèse. He also rages at her, blaming her for ruining their marriage with her childish terror. When his anger turns to physical abuse, Thérèse submits to it gladly, hoping that physical pain of abuse will numb her passions.

Madame Raquin is somehow ignorant of Thérèse's passionate nature until after she finds out the truth about the murder. She feels that God has lied to her all of her life, protecting her from the truth. "And she had remained a child, foolishly believing in a myriad of silly things, without seeing the reality of life as it was, mired in a bloody slough of passion" (Chap. 26, p. 153). With that thought, she seems to realize that human nature is passionate and horrible.

Burial, Funerals, and Corpses

Burial and other funeral imagery comprises another theme in the novel. The initial description of the Passage du Pont-Neuf presents it as an "underground gallery dimly lit by three funerary lanterns" (Chap. 1, p. 10). When Thérèse first enters the shop that Madame Raquin has purchased for their move to Paris, she feels as if she is walking down into a grave pit. She sees death in the faces of each of the Thursday guests. She even hallucinates that she is "buried in a vault together with mechanical bodies" (Chap. 4, p. 25). She complains to Laurent that she has been buried alive in the shop.

When Madame Raquin has a stroke, she resembles a person who has been buried alive by mistake. Her body is a corpse, although her mind is still alive. In Madame Raquin, the themes of punishment and burial overlap. Her punishment is the burial of her mind in her lifeless body. By being buried alive in this way, she is powerless to seek justice for her son's murder, once she learns the truth.

Camille's corpse plays a large part in the plot of the novel. His presence in Thérèse and Laurent's marriage is the drowned man's own revenge, preventing them from the



passionate love they imagined by getting rid of their obstacle. The specter of the corpse is a constant presence in their lives. However, Laurent is also haunted by Camille's actual corpse when he studies it too long at the morgue. He cannot get the picture of the ruined body out of his mind. Eventually, the corpse finds its way into Laurent's paintings, ruining his plans for becoming an artist.

Style

Point of View

The point of view for Thérèse Raquin is third person omniscient. This wide lens for story telling works extremely well in a novel with so few characters. The focus changes frequently between Thérèse, Laurent, and Madame Raquin. Early in the novel, Camille's character is also somewhat expanded by focusing the point of view through him as the reader watches him walk to and from work.

The point of view is straightforward and the shifts in focus are easy to follow. The narrator provides details about the environment and the story. However, the power of this point of view lies in presenting the inner workings of the focus characters. The reader learns much about Thérèse, Laurent, and Madame Raquin through the focus on their thoughts, emotions, fears, plans, and memories. These inner character revelations are extremely important to the novel's success, especially for developing the themes of burial and imprisonment. Much of these themes happen internally in the characters' thoughts and feelings.

The point of view does not delve deep into the thoughts of Michaud, Oliver, Suzanne, or Grivet. These characters are described in basic narration. However, they are mostly shown through their basic actions and dialogue with one another. The corpse of Camille is not revealed through a point of view focus at all, which leaves him nothing more than a mutual hallucination between the murderers.

Setting

The overall setting of the novel is nineteenth century Paris. The novel begins in the Passage du Pont-Neuf, which is a bad part of town. The narrow, damp, dark alley is nothing more than a shortcut, only visited by people who want to shave a few minutes off of their walk somewhere else. It is not a pleasant place to be.

The novel quickly backtracks to the history of the family. Thérèse comes to live with the Raquins while Madame Raquin is a haberdashery shop owner in the small town of Vernon. The home is a perpetual sick house, with Camille battling one sickness after another. Thérèse is not allowed to run and to play like other children, but must stay calm and quiet, and even has to sleep in the same bed as her sickly cousin and submit to his medicines. After Camille's father dies, Madame Raquin retires to a quiet country life in a little rented house by the Seine, where Thérèse feels much happier with her increased freedom.

Camille insists that they move to Paris, and Madame Raquin purchases the dreadful shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf. Thérèse compares it to a grave, and being low and



dark, it does resemble a tomb. The shop where Thérèse and Madame Raquin spend their days is dreary, and Thérèse is not motivated to redecorate at all. They have some customers, but mostly only the working girls in the neighborhood.

The apartment above the shop is a great room that is kitchen, dining, and sitting room altogether. There is a bedroom on each side of the dining room - one for Madame Raquin, and one for Thérèse with Camille at first, and later Laurent. Almost the entire novel takes place in these few rooms, although some scenes take place in Laurent's studio and attic room, the morgue, and other minor locations.

The other major setting is the location of Camille's murder. Camille takes his wife and friend Laurent on an outing to Saint-Ouen. They rest on a little island by the river, and go to a restaurant before taking the boat out on its fatal voyage. This setting is a major plot point, but only appears in one chapter of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The novel's sentences and language are appropriate for the time period in which the novel was written, in the mid-eighteen hundreds. Although the translation by Robin Buss makes much of the dialogue more modern and accessible to today's readers, most of the language is much more formal than is usual in our times. Even though much of the vocabulary and language are sophisticated, it is not difficult to follow the novel's plot. The location names remain in French, which provides context for the novel being mostly set in Paris. However, a familiarity with French is not required to enjoy the story.

Zola wanted to write about what might happen between two characters of contrasting temperaments. At the time the novel was written, temperaments predominated the thoughts about human physiology. The language in this novel continuously points out the contrast between Laurent and Thérèse. Laurent is constantly described as sanguine; Thérèse is nervous. The language chosen surrounding these two characters supports this contrast. The vocabulary chosen also draws the readers back to the themes of punishment and burial throughout the novel. It draws attention to the horrors of the worst of human nature and our disgusting passion. The language and meaning of the novel make Zola's critique on passion, adultery, and crime quite plain.

Structure

The plot of the novel is simple with few characters. The novel is roughly divided into three parts, although not formally. The novel is thirty-two fairly short chapters, which keeps the reader on a quick pace. The novel begins with a look at an average evening at the shop after Camille, Thérèse, and Madame Raquin move to Paris. The second chapter backtracks to Vernon and the country house. The rest of the first third of the novel familiarizes the reader with the characters and the setting in the Passage du Pont Neuf. Thérèse and Laurent begin their affair. The first major plot point arrives when Laurent can no longer leave work to meet Thérèse, and they discuss getting rid of Camille.



In the second part of the novel, Thérèse and Laurent drown Camille, and patiently wait to achieve a respectable marriage. Laurent tries to bury the crime with the victim, and Thérèse seems to blossom once free from her cumbersome marriage to Camille.

The third section of the novel focuses on the murderer's marriage and final punishment. It also provides irony with the Thursday gatherings, where the Raquins' friends all believe Thérèse and Laurent to be an honest, happy pair who cares for their invalid aunt, Madame Raquin thoughtfully and lovingly.



Quotes

"And Thérèse could not see a single human, not a living creature, among these grotesque and sinister beings with whom she was shut up. At times she would suffer hallucinations, thinking that she was buried in a vault together with mechanical bodies whose heads moved and whose arms and legs waved when their strings were pulled." Chap. 4, pp. 24-25

"The act was silent and brutal." Chap. 6, p. 34

"Then they buried me alive in this vile shop." Chap. 7, p. 37

"But he will bury the lot of us. All those types with one foot in the grave never seem to die." Chap. 9, p. 48

"And, one held in the other, the hands burned, the damp palms stuck together and the clenched fingers bruised one another whenever the cab shook. It seemed to Laurent and Thérèse that the blood of the other was flowing into their chests through their joined hands; their fists became the burning hearth on which their life seethed. Wrapped in the darkness and the desolate silence around them, this furious squeezing of hands was like a crushing weight bearing down on Camille's head to keep it under the water." Chap. 12, p. 69

"The Morgue is a show that anyone can afford, which poor and rich passers-by get for free. The door is open, anyone can come in. There are connoisseurs who go out of their way not to miss one of these spectacles of death. When the slabs are empty, people go out disappointed, robbed, muttering under their breath. When the slabs are well filled, and when there is a fine display of human flesh, the visitors crowd in, getting a cheap thrill, horrified, joking, applauding or whistling, as in the theatre, and go away contented, announcing that the Morgue has been a success that day." Chap. 13, p. 73

"In killing Camille, they had managed to assuage the raging and insatiable desire that they had been unable to satisfy in one another's arms. They experienced in their crime a sensation of gratification so intense that it sickened them and made their embraces repulsive." Chap. 16, p. 80

"For more than a year, Thérèse and Laurent carried the chain lightly that was clamped to their limbs, binding them together. In the mental collapse that followed the acute crisis of the murder, in the feelings of disgust and the need to calm and forgetting that came after that, the two prisoners could imagine that they were free and that no iron link bound them together. The chain lay slack on the ground, while they rested, stricken with a kind of happy stupor, and tried to find love elsewhere, to lead sensibly balanced lives. But on the day when circumstances drove them once more to exchange words of desire, the chain suddenly tightened and they experienced such a shock that they felt attached to one another for ever." Chap. 18, p. 94



"They were married but they were profoundly astonished to find that they had no awareness of anything new. They felt that a huge gulf still separated them and from time to time they wondered how they could cross this gulf. It seemed as though they were back before the murder, when a material obstacle stood between them. Then suddenly they remembered that they would sleep together that evening, in a few hours, and they looked at one another in amazement, not understanding they would be allowed to do that. They did not feel any union between them. On the contrary, they imagined that they had just been violently pulled apart and cast far away from each other." Chap. 20, p. 110

"For more than a fortnight, Laurent wondered what he could do to kill Camille again. He had thrown the man in the water and still he was not sufficiently dead, but came back every night to lie at Thérèse's side. Even when the murderers thought they had completed the killing and could indulge the sweet pleasures of their love, the victim would return to chill their marriage bed. Thérèse was not a widow: Laurent found himself married to a wife who already had a drowned man as her husband." Chap. 22, p. 129

"Thérèse's lips sought out Camille's bite on Laurent's stiff, swollen neck and she fixed her mouth on it with savage passion. Here was the open wound; once this was healed, the murderers could sleep easy." Chap. 23, p. 130

"All he managed to do was to make himself more depressed. When people were yelling and shouting all around, he could hear the great silence inside him; when a woman was kissing him or when he emptied his glass, he found nothing in his intoxication but melancholy and sadness. He was no longer able to indulge in lust and gluttony: his being had cooled and as it were, gone hard inside; food and kisses only irritated him. Sickened before he began, he could not manage to arouse his imagination, to excite his senses and his stomach. The more he drove himself to debauchery, the more he suffered, and that was that." Chap. 31, p. 187



Topics for Discussion

How does the novel present the idea of different temperaments (as opposed to characters)? What type of temperament does Thérèse have? What type of temperament does Camille have? What type of temperament does Laurent have? How do their temperaments complement or oppose each other?

How does Thérèse's childhood prepare her for her future life of deception and hypocrisy?

Discuss the similarities and differences of the characters with an animal-type nature, and the more mechanical personalities, especially of the Thursday friends?

Do Thérèse and Laurent receive a just punishment for Camille's murder? What about for their adultery?

Is Madame Raquin culpable in this story? What is her crime and punishment? Is it just?

How does Madame Raquin respond to the truth about Thérèse and Laurent? Discuss her blasphemy.

Do the characters in this story exercise free will? What most drives each character in his or her actions and mental breakdown?