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**Naturalism**

Naturalism attempted to look deeper into one self by examining the underlying reasons behind a person’s belief system. Naturalist thought that certain factors, such as hereditary genes, were unavoidable and would always determine parts of ones life. Naturalism meant that there was no free will, or at least no way to change the outcomes previously determined by genetics, environment, and social factors. The theories of [Charles Darwin](http://www.online-literature.com/darwin/) are often identified as playing a role in the development of literary Naturalism. Darwin never used his theories compared to social culture so many authors abused his theories. This line of thinking came to be known as Social Darwinism, and today is recognized as the systematized, scientific racism that it is. More than a few atrocities in world history were perpetrated by those who misguidedly applied Darwinism to the social realm. Naturalism, for better or worse, is in some respects a form of Social Darwinism played out in fiction. http://www.online-literature.com/periods/naturalism.php

Some believe that naturalism is just a specialized version of realism; however, not all realism can be seen as naturalism. The main theme of naturalism is that characters are fated to whichever destiny they were prepared for. This period lasted from the 1880s-1930s.

**Emile Zola**

He lived 1840-1902 and lived and died in Paris, France. His full name is Émile-Édouard-Charles-Antoine Zola and he was the most prominent French author of the 19th century. He failed his exams to further his education twice and ended up unemployed and living in poverty for two years until finally being hired by L-C-F Hatchett, a publishing firm. In 1865, Zola published his first novel La Confession de Claud. Following his first publication, Zola quit his job and published two more novels: [*Thérèse Raquin*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Therese-Raquin) (1867), a grisly tale of murder and its aftermath that is still widely read, and *Madeleine Férat* (1868), an unsuccessful attempt at bringing heredity into his work. After a few more attempts at publishing, Zola published his 20 book novel, entitled *Les Rougon-Macquart.*

Zola was seen as the founder of the naturalist movement and the most celebrated author. He published several treatises to explain his theories on art, including *Le Roman expérimental* (1880; *[The Experimental Novel](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Experimental-Novel)*). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Emile-Zola>

**Le Roman Experimental**

* Published in 1880 and is a collection of articles
* Attempts to raise literature to that of exact science
* Zola was influenced by the theories of heredity written about in Claude Bernard’s The Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine
* Talks of an experimental novelist and an observer
* Written to prove three points: that Bernard’s theories could be applied to literature, to prove that naturalism was different than realism and romanticism with the use of the experimental method, and to dispel critique from those calling his work immoral

1. The first and longest section gives the title to the entire collection. It introduces and applies Bernard’s theories while explaining how the characters observed to expose behaviors. The focus was heredity and the environment and explaining Bernard’s *Introduction.*
2. The second section was entitled “Letter to Youth.” In this section, Zola attacks romanticism and defends naturalism.

* Zola takes the three parts of Bernard’s study and explains them throughout his novel
  + Observation: The experimental novel observes society and the individual. The novelist studies the society and different geographic locations to form the specific idea that the experiment will be based on.
  + Experiment: The experiment is actually the novel itself. The novelist creates characters and then places them into experimental conditions where the characters have to test their hypothesis. The experiment is supposed to arise from hereditary attributes.
  + Results/ Conclusions: The actions, emotions, and physical states of the characters at the end of the novel are the results of the experiment. In Zola’s thoughts, society has to interpret the results of the experimenter, not the novelist. The point is to compare the initial idea with the results to figure out human nature.

**Criticism**

* Zola takes quotations out of context and uses them to support unrelated ideas
* Zola claims that experimental novelist serve the same purpose as philosophers; however, Bernard states that philosophers cannot prove scientific theories and that goes against Zola’s claim that the experimental novel is a necessary scientific enterprise
* His experiment does not conform to Bernard’s version of an experiment
  + Bernard’s observation theory is just a report of naturally occurring phenomena and his experiment is verifying a hypothesis comparing the natural observation and manipulated observation.
  + Zola takes an original observation and then compares it to the results of an experiment but it is an entirely fictional experiment. There are no real people and no actual results.

**Conclusion**

Though Zola technically had a flawed version of observation and experiment, his work still fascinates people. They see it as a case study with the emphasis on science and the interaction between the arts and science during the nineteenth century.