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* Introduction by Havelock Ellis, 1894, from the Everyman's Library edition

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NOTES

We reprint the Vintage Classics paperback edition (ISBN 0-679-75430-X) with several spelling corrections. We recommend, however, the translation by Stanley and Eleanor Hochman, in the Signet Classic paperback edition (ISBN 0451-51975-2), because its English is more contemporary and in a few cases is closer to the vulgar French of the original. A Penguin Classics translation is also widely available. Any of these printed books would be easier to read than this online edition.

The original text in French has been placed online in ATHENA in Switzerland.

An excellent motion picture film has been adapted from this novel and is available on videotape from Sony Pictures Classics. It is rated R because of some nudity and profanity. It is in French, in letter-box format, with English subtitles. This Claude Berri film (copyright 1993) stars Gerard Depardieu, Renaud, Miou-Miou, Jean Carmet, Judith Henry, and Jean-Roger Milo. It was made with the assistance of Region Nord/Pas-de-Calais, Ministere de la Culture et de la Francophonie, of Centre Nationale de la Cinematographie, and of Ministere de l'Education Nationale, and supported by Funds Eurimages of the European Council. The film, although it is on two video cartridges, does improve on the book by leaving out many of the author's excesses of bad taste, although we are sorry to see it fails to show the spectacular, cinematic collapse of the mine toward the end of the book. While the working people in the film are treated sympathetically, Zola's treatment in the book veers back and forth, from seeing them as much animals as heroes.

A study guide to the novel has been put online by Paul Brians, Department of English, Washington State University.

It has been said that this novel is one of confrontations, and the detail of the book makes this even plainer than the film. It is instructive to reflect on the political philosophy of early socialism and anarchism shown here. The concept of the "general strike" and the politicalization of labor strife are here apparent in a French historical context. Further, critics have remarked on the peculiarly French 19th-century social vice of envy rather than fraternity. While the film seems to romanticize somewhat the landscape in the style of some French rural painting, the book integrates better the French preoccupation with smells, sex, and food as necessary parts of life. In any case, this is one novel that seems to have escaped from the confines of Zola's aesthetic philosophy of positivism and determinism in fiction to achieve a romantic greatness of its own not so much appreciated at the time.

The word "Germinal" was used for a period after the French revolution of 1789 to refer to the calendar month corresponding to about March. Another point that may be confusing in the translation is the reference to ordinary people by their inflected last name: for example, "Moque" for the old man, "Moquet" for his son, and "Moquette" for his daughter. Toussaint Maheu's wife is thus called "Maheude" instead of "Mrs. Maheu" or "the Maheu woman."

We'd like to be able to refer you to more about Zola on the World Wide Web, but it's just not there yet. A Zola home page seems to have disappeared from the web. Watch the BooksOnline