

**At Close Quarters: Workers' Housing in Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1876) and
Henry Gréville's *Cité Ménéard* (1880)**

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While the attention to detail of Émile Zola (1840-1902) in documenting the life of working class Parisians as part of his Rougon-Macquart series is well-recognised and has been widely studied,¹ that of his contemporary Henry Gréville (Alice Fleury Durand, 1842-1902) is now almost universally unknown, despite the fact that the latter was regularly cited in her heyday as an antidote to Zola's scabrous writings. Barbey d'Aurevilly, for example, refers to Gréville's praiseworthy ability to avoid "le détail dégoûtant des crudités basses"² (the disgusting details of low crudeness) without renouncing accurate and moving description sympathetic to the plight of the working classes. For Barbey and for his contemporary Marius Topin, who refers to "toutes les fanges" (all the mire) wallowed in by Zola,³ women writers were able, by virtue of their sex, to focus effectively on the darker aspects of the human condition without descending to the indelicate.

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¹For example, Jean-Louis Bory refers to Zola's desire for "le maximum de précision objective, irréfutable" (the greatest possible degree of objective, irrefutable precision), "Préface" in Emile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (Paris, 1978), 13. All references to this work are to this edition and quotations retain original orthography. For the reader's convenience, page numbers for quotations from novels have been inserted directly into the text.

²Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Les Bas-bleus* (Paris, 1878), 302.

³Marius Topin, *Romanciers contemporains* (Paris, 1876), 241. Neither of these judgements can be inspired by a direct comparison of Zola with *Cité Ménéard*, however, since the latter was not published until 1880. For a full discussion of the genderisation of literature in late nineteenth-century France, see Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: Women Writers at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Nashville, Tenn., 2006).

In addition to this historic debate around gender, writing and realism however, a second factor, the gendering of urban spaces, needs to be taken into account. Janet Wolff has maintained, in a seminal paper on the treatment of space in the literature of modernity, that women were largely restricted to the household, while men took on the role of the *flâneur*, circulating through and observing the urban environment.⁴ These separate domains are analysed elsewhere by Sharon Marcus in the light of literary representations, such as realist novels, *physiologies* and *tableaux*, featuring interiors and exteriors (using examples drawn exclusively from male writers).⁵ As Marcus points out, however, the voyeuristic objectification of women common to these texts, whether placing the female figure in her home or in the streets, “had the unintended effect of bringing women into the city or bringing the city to women, and did not, as Wolff implies, simply confine them to an impermeable private space.”⁶ Marcus cites as examples of these border-crossing depictions James Rousseau’s *Physiologie de la portière* (1841) and Taxile Delord’s 1854 *Paris portière*: both works focus on the role of the women, later to be known as *concierges*, responsible for aspects of the upkeep of the apartment building and the well-being of its tenants. Where Wolff considers interior and exterior as mutually exclusive female and male spaces, Marcus focuses instead on the borders between the two, seen as zones of exchange and passage.

Through a comparison between Zola’s *L’Assommoir*, published in 1876, and Gréville’s *Cité Ménard*, which appeared four years later and can be considered in several respects to be a kind of anti-*Assommoir*, this essay will explore some key contrasts and similarities between the two works. It will look in particular at the ways in which male and female roles are allocated, and male and female spaces designated, before finally drawing some comparisons with nineteenth-century workers’ housing schemes.

How do the two works represent the home life and gender roles of the working class? Although they depict other spaces, both novels give a central role to communal housing: the enormous *maison à étages* (multi-storey house, apartment building) in *L’Assommoir* and the less well-defined eponymous *Cité Ménard*⁷ provide sites in which the interplay of main story and subplots arises naturally from the close proximity of a range of characters. There are a number of *répliques* in the later novel, in the sense of both replica and retort (in other words, Grévillean characters who correspond to Zola’s, but with a twist). Virginie, Gervaise’s arch-enemy at *L’Assommoir*’s beginning,⁸ is echoed in some of Gréville’s *modistes* with a poor work record who live beyond their means (a characteristic Zola would expand on in his 1880 *Nana*): for the heroine Cécile these bad examples merely serve to reinforce her strong moral sense.⁹ Zola’s young Nana,

⁴ Janet Wolff, “The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity” in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley, 1990), 34–50.

⁵ The representation of such spaces by women writers of the same period has yet to be thoroughly researched.

⁶ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley, 1999), 38.

⁷ The term *cit * can refer to both a single construction or to a group of buildings: Gr ville does not clarify the nature of *Cit  M nard*.

⁸ She is Gervaise’s opponent in the famous fight in the *lavoir* (public wash-house, 39–49).

⁹ See *Cit  M nard*, 50–51. References to this work will henceforth be indicated by the abbreviation *CM* and the page number inserted directly into the text.

growing up more or less wild on the streets to become the most celebrated prostitute in Paris in the following volume of the Rougon-Macquart series, has an equivalent in little Noémie, who, instead of leading childish escapades, works hard to help her family. Lantier, the seducer, is replicated in the handsome and immoral Léonard, who is “un grand habitué du Moulin de la Galette” (*CM*, 76; a real regular at the Moulin de la Galette) but who, unlike Lantier, finally sees the light and seeks a wife (*CM*, 350-353; 414-416). Both novels feature *concierges* who delight in the misfortunes of their tenants, although Gréville balances the negativity of her character, *la mère* Nathalie, by introducing a female guardian figure whose values triumph in the end, whereas Zola’s treacherous Madame Boche and her husband remain unfeeling toward others’ suffering to the very end.

It is tempting, especially in light of gender-based critical opinions of the time, to attribute Gréville’s softer depiction and Zola’s grittier one to their respective sexes. I will argue, however, that these differing approaches to similar settings gain from being considered within the broader context of workers’ housing and associated, often genderised, practices.

L’Assommoir

Both authors place women at the centre of their work as key elements of the plot and the functioning of the house itself. Zola’s heroine, or perhaps anti-heroine, Gervaise, moves in with her children and husband, Coupeau, to a large multi-family house with “300 locataires” (67; 300 tenants) in the Goutte d’Or in Montmartre. The building is described in great detail as Gervaise first sees it:

Sur la rue, la maison avait cinq étages, alignant chacun à la file quinze fenêtres, dont les persiennes noires, aux lames cassées, donnaient un air de ruine à cet immense pan de muraille. En bas, quatre boutiques occupaient le rez-de-chaussée: à droite de la porte, une vaste salle de gargote graisseuse; à gauche, un charbonnier, un mercier et une marchande de parapluies. La maison paraissait d’autant plus colossale qu’elle s’élevait entre deux petites constructions basses, chétives, collées contre elle; et, carrée, pareille à un bloc de mortier gâché grossièrement, se pourrissant et s’émiettant sous la pluie, elle profilait sur le ciel clair, au-dessus des toits voisins, son énorme cube brut, ses flancs non crépis, couleur de boue, d’une nudité interminable de murs de prison, où des rangées de pierres d’attente semblaient des mâchoires caduques, bâillant dans le vide. [...] Gervaise voulut l’attendre dans la rue. Cependant, elle ne put s’empêcher de s’enfoncer sous le porche, jusqu’à la loge du concierge, qui était à droite. Et là, au seuil, elle leva de nouveau les yeux. A l’intérieur, les façades avaient six étages, quatre façades régulières enfermant le vaste carré de la cour. C’étaient des murailles grises, mangées d’une lèpre jaune, rayées de bavures par l’égouttement des toits, qui montaient toutes plates du pavé aux ardoises, sans une moulure –, seuls les tuyaux de descente se coudaient aux étages, où les caisses béantes des plombs mettaient la tache de leur fonte rouillée. Les fenêtres sans persienne montraient des vitres nues, d’un vert glauque d’eau trouble. Certaines, ouvertes, laissaient pendre des matelas à carreaux bleus, qui prenaient l’air; devant d’autres, sur des cordes tendues, des linges séchaient, toute la lessive d’un ménage, les

chemises de l'homme, les camisoles de la femme, les culottes des gamins; il y en avait une, au troisième, où s'étalait une couche d'enfant, emplâtrée d'ordure. Du haut en bas, les logements trop petits crevaient au-dehors, lâchaient des bouts de leur misère par toutes les fentes. (64-65)

On the street side, it had five storeys, each with a row of fifteen windows, their black shutters with broken slats lending an air of desolation to the huge expanse of wall. Below, on the ground floor, there were four shops: to the right of the door: a huge greasy chophouse; at the left: a coal merchant's, a draper's and an umbrella shop. The house seemed all the more vast since it stood between two low, puny little buildings that huddled against it; and square-set, like a crudely cast block of cement, decaying and flaking in the rain, its huge cube stood out against the clear sky above the neighbouring roofs, the mud-coloured sides unrendered and having the endless nakedness of prison walls, with rows of joint stones resembling empty jaw-bones gaping in the void. [...] Gervaise wanted to wait for him in the street, but she could not resist stepping through the doorway as far as the concierge's lodge, which was on the right. Here, on the threshold, she looked upwards once again. On the inside, the four regular façades surrounding the huge square courtyard rose to six storeys. They consisted of grey walls, with leprous yellow patches, rising featureless from the paving-stones to the roofing slates without any moulding, and streaked with stains that had trickled off the roof; the only irregularity was where the downpipes bent at each floor where the cast-iron of the gaping cisterns left rusty stains. The windows had no shutters, but exhibited their bare panes, which had the blue-green tint of murky water. Some were open, to allow blue check mattresses to hang out and air, while others had cords stretched across them with clothes on, a whole family's washing: the man's shirts, the woman's camisoles, the children's pants. From one, on the third floor, hung a child's nappy, smeared with filth. From top to bottom, cramped dwellings spilled outside, letting scraps of their poverty escape through every opening.¹⁰

Two things are striking about this initial, lengthy description of the house. First, the numerous indications of the degradation and insalubrious condition of the building, and second, the way in which the intimate (the laundry) spills out into public space in a symbolic representation of the lack of privacy such crowded accommodation entails.¹¹ As Gervaise's fortunes go downhill, so do her living quarters. When she dies (of alcoholism and destitution, starving to death) the undertaker, *père* Bazouge, comes to fetch her from the "*trou sous l'escalier*" (517; "hole under the staircase", 430), little more than a cupboard, the meanest and most miserable housing the apartment building offers. Other occupants of the house have been unsupportive of her in her growing distress, as exemplified by Coupeau's sisters and their families, also resident in the house, and

¹⁰ Émile Zola, *The Drinking Den*, trans. Robin Buss (London, 2003), 44-45. For the convenience of readers, the English translations from Zola's French are from this reference edition.

¹¹ As numerous housing commentators of the period pointed out, crowding and lack of privacy were considered to lead to immoral behaviour and insanitary conditions. See for example, Émile Cacheux, *Habitations ouvrières à la fin du XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1891); or Arthur Raffalovich, *Le Logement de l'ouvrier et du pauvre: États-Unis, Grande-Bretagne, France, Allemagne, Belgique* (Paris, 1887).

seemingly unmoved by Gervaise's account of their alcoholic brother's prolonged death-throes (512-516).

A further and important element of Zola's work is evident both in the description of the house, and in the plot generally – Gervaise's subordination to her male companion, Coupeau. While in accordance with Zola's theories of hereditary behaviour Gervaise is doomed from the start to a sticky end, it is worth noting her subservience to both her seducer and first lover, Lantier, and to her husband, Coupeau. The possible salvation offered by the blacksmith, Goujet, whose love Gervaise ultimately rejects, is in that sense merely a variation on the theme of female passivity. Although ostensibly achieving an enviable situation as a washerwoman with her own premises and staff, Gervaise's rise and fall are both as much a matter of her being supported or undermined by a man as they are of heredity.

Cité Ménéard

In the later novel, the central character is Cécile, a young orphan living with an elderly aunt in the Cité Ménéard. While there is no "set piece" description of the building comparable to Zola's detailed and symbolically-charged presentation of the Goutte d'or house, Gréville's objectives in the picture that emerges gradually are clearly quite different:

Ils avaient fini de monter, car ils étaient au sommet de la butte. Ils franchirent une large grille ouverte à deux battants, puis Cécile courut devant et monta les quatre étages de l'escalier comme un sylphe. Linot, plus lourd et déjà essoufflé par la rude escalade qu'il venait de faire si vite, s'appuya à la rampe en fer forgé d'un dessin ancien, qui contournait l'escalier assez spacieux, et monta en soupirant à chaque marche. Il n'avait pas atteint le second étage lorsque Cécile revint à lui et lui mit la main sur l'épaule avec une douceur compatissante. [...]

Dans les ménages d'ouvriers, c'est le dimanche qui est le jour du nettoyage général. [...] dès l'aube, la ruche retentit de sons aigus et pressés: ce sont les brosses grinçant sur l'évier, les coups de balai sonores dans les coins qui s'obstinent à garder la poussière; si les plinthes ont une âme ou seulement une vague sensibilité, elles doivent redouter cruellement ce jour-là. On entend du haut en bas la rampe de l'escalier gémir sous les mains affairées des jeunes garçons qui montent l'un après l'autre assez de seaux d'eau pour faire croire à la légende des Danaïdes. On voit à tous les étages des mains s'agitant pour secouer des torchons d'où s'échappent des nuées de duvets variés de formes et de couleur, et au-dessus des garde-manger de bois percés de trous en losange qui garnissent les fenêtres des cuisines, on aperçoit, surmontées de têtes sérieuses et absorbées, des mains chaussées de bottines qui manient activement le cirage et la brosse. (*CM*, 14-15; 42-43)

They had stopped climbing, because they were at the top of the Butte. They went through a large, open double gate. Then Cécile ran on ahead, moving lithely up the four flights of stairs. Linot, meanwhile, heavier and out of breath from the steep climb he had made so quickly, leaned on the antique-style cast iron handrail that edged the broad staircase, climbing onward with a sigh on every step. He had

not yet reached the second floor when Cécile came back down to him, putting her hand on his shoulder in gentle sympathy. [...]

In workers' households, Sunday is general housekeeping day. From daybreak on, the hive buzzes with high-pitched, hurried sounds. This is the noise of brushes scrubbing over sinks, of brooms thumping into corners with their clinging dust; if skirting boards have a soul, or even a trace of sensitivity, they must live in cruel fear of Sundays. From the top to the bottom of the house you can hear the stair rail groan beneath the busy hands of young boys carrying up water, bucket after bucket, enough to make you believe the legend of the Danaids. On every floor hands are seen shaking out cloths that let fly clouds of dust of varying shapes and colours, and above the wooden food-safes with their diamond-shaped air holes sitting in the kitchen windows serious and focused faces are to be seen, along with boot-clad hands working hard with brush and polish.¹²

The emphasis in this, and other descriptions of the Cité, is on the activities of the inhabitants, who form a largely cohesive community under the guidance of the energetic Cécile. Described at one point as an "*ange gardien*" (CM, 261; guardian angel), she assists her neighbours in a variety of ways, which range from dissuading them from committing adultery to taking into their care a newborn whose mother has just died. While the private flows out into public view here too, Gréville's description stresses the opposite principles from those of Zola's earlier work. *Cité Ménard* can thus be seen as centered on an active rather than a passive female role, and on a desire to maintain and improve the house, which is reflected in the busy and generally harmonious life of the tenants.

A number of Grévillean instances of mutual support are confirmed by historical documentation. As Alain Faure points out, in times of need, "La maisonnée restait cependant la première des ressources qui s'offrait pour se retourner" (The residents of the house were nevertheless the first available resource for getting back on your feet)¹³ Cécile is at the heart of a number of these good deeds, making arrangements for the orphaned newborn, supplying funeral wreaths to bereaved families, organising subscriptions to pay for them, or sending for the doctor in cases of illness.

Borderlines: public and private lives and the role of the *portière*

L'Assommoir and *Cité Ménard* appear thus to be in opposition to each other in terms of their representation of communal workers' housing. While Zola's initial description focuses at length on the external view of the house and is rife with signs of decay, Gréville's begins with the interior and is dominated by action, energy and collaboration as personified by Cécile. This female role might arguably be the moral obligation of the *concierge* or *portière*; however, neither Madame Boche nor *la mère* Nathalie can be trusted with this kind of responsibility. *La mère* Nathalie is a thoroughly unpleasant, untrustworthy and literally invasive woman:

¹² Translations of Gréville (and all other translations apart from Zola's novel) are my own.

¹³ Alain Faure, "Le Cœur populaire" in Collectif, *Le Peuple de Paris au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2011), 104. Faure also comments that orphaned children might be adopted informally in situations similar to that of the newborn child in *Cité Ménard*.

[...] une tête coiffée d'un petit bonnet blanc se montrait dans l'ouverture et souriait d'un air narquois. Le corps suivit la tête, et une femme d'environ quarante-cinq ans entra dans la salle à manger, sans toutefois quitter la porte, qu'elle tenait de la main droite.

– La clef était dans la serrure, dit-elle, toujours en souriant; je vous demande pardon, mais j'avais frappé deux fois, et vous n'aviez pas entendu. C'était un mensonge, mais ce n'était pas le premier [...] (CM, 106)

[...] a head wearing a little white cap appeared in the opening, smiling a sly smile. A body followed the head, and a woman of about forty-five came into the dining room, although she was still holding on to the door with her right hand.

"The key was in the lock," she said, still smiling. "I do ask your pardon, I knocked twice but you didn't hear."

This was a lie, but it was not the first such.

Zola's hypocritical Madame Boche changes allegiance at the drop of a hat, attending Gervaise's wedding banquet but maintaining a friendship with her rival Virginie; Gréville's Nathalie is a thoroughly sinister character, who aids and abets tenants in debauchery and drunkenness and is not above using poison in the hope of personal gain. Few writers of the period go this far toward melodrama in their depictions of the *portière*: however, it is clear that the established stereotype perpetuated by some of the authors of *physiologies*, while mildly comic, is essentially irritating and unreliable, inclined to exercise petty powers over tenants. *Paris portière* advises readers: "N'oubliez jamais que la portière tient votre sort entre les mains, que votre bonne ou maivaise réputation dépend d'elle entièrement" (Never forget that the *portière* holds your fate in her hands, that your good or bad reputation is entirely dependent on her).¹⁴ According to Élodie Massouline, strict entry surveillance by the *concierge* was part of the "règlement intérieur coercitif" (draconian internal regulations) that included a strict 10 p.m. curfew and that made workers shun the so-called model housing of the Cité Napoléon, opened in November 1851.¹⁵ Close supervision, bringing about the elimination of the boundaries between public and private spaces, particularly when it leads to gossip (*L'Assommoir*) and the exploitation of tenants' secrets (*Cité Ménard*), is far from the ideal of communal housing, particularly when the person entrusted with the role is morally corrupt, as is the case in both novels.

Gréville's Cécile provides a counter-balance to *la mère* Nathalie of a type entirely absent from Zola's novel, reasserting a female model of collectivity and potential salvation, as opposed to the Rougon-Macquart's downward-driven template tracing the fall of generations of a family against the background of the decline of the Second Republic.

¹⁴Taxile Delord, Arnould Frémy and Edmond Texier, *Paris portière* (Paris [1854]), 78.

¹⁵*Le Peuple de Paris au XIX^e siècle*, 122. See also Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago, 1995), 85, and Catherine Bruant, *La Cité Napoléon: une expérience controversée de logements ouvriers à Paris* (Versailles, 2011).

Male and female writing

As Mesch has pointed out, fears about the proliferation of women writers in the late nineteenth century led to trenchant evaluations of their work by male critics. While many of these critics also rejected the Zolian “*pot de chambre*” (chamberpot),¹⁶ they were nonetheless quick to claim that women gave a large place to sentiment rather than objectivity and reason. Is *Cité Ménard* merely a sentimentalised “lady’s” version of *L’Assommoir*? Certainly it differs from Zola’s vision of a society in decline, with his novel telling individual stories only as they fit into a catamorphic model leading to failure and/or death, following a plot arc predetermined by negative factors such as genetics and the uncaring, degrading urban environment. *Cité Ménard*, in contrast, follows an anamorphic model leading to salvation and a happy ending for the majority of its characters. Some of these are saved only by self-reform, illustrating the ability of humans to overcome even well-established patterns of behaviour. Gréville’s fictional world is not entirely hopeful, however. Other characters do not survive their circumstances; alcoholism, infectious disease and criminality take their toll.

To better appreciate the deeper differences between the two novels, and perhaps their authors’ worldviews, we need to consider the ways in which they use the setting of working-class Paris and, in particular, their representations of internal and external space. While France did not have a Ruskin, with his careful distinctions between male and female roles as laid out in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) to which Wolff ties the separation between male public space and female private space in the Victorian imaginary,¹⁷ a similar stand can be found in the writings of the anti-Saint-Simonian Proudhon: “Je dis que le règne de la femme est dans la famille; que la sphère de son rayonnement est le domicile conjugal” (I say that woman’s realm is within the family; that her sphere of influence is the marital home).¹⁸ Ruskin’s *protégée*, Octavia Hill, also echoes the concept of a female “angel in the house” when she declares that the best type of caretaker of workers’ lodgings is “a nice motherly woman of good character”¹⁹ – in other words, someone having precisely the upright, kindly and efficient characteristics not associated with either of our fictional *portières*.

As the industrial revolution increasingly affected French towns and cities, a range of housing solutions were developed, from the barracks-like style of the “*usine-pensionnat*” (boarding-factory) set up in Jujurieux for Joseph-Claude Bonnet’s silk-workers in 1835 to Robert Godin’s Fourier-influenced “*Familstère*” in Guise, begun in 1856. The latter, like the *Cité Napoléon* and the *cit  ouvri re* founded in 1853 in Mulhouse by Jean Dollfus, included garden allotments for the residents. Far from being confined to the kind of claustrophobic environments depicted by Zola, as symbolically illustrated by Gervaise’s ever-shrinking living quarters, these workers, male and female,

¹⁶ Barbey d’Aurevilly, *Les Bas-bleus*, 294.

¹⁷ Janet Wolff, “The Culture of Separate Spheres,” *Feminine Sentences*, 12-33.

¹⁸ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la pornocratie, ou, les femmes dans les temps modernes* (Paris, 1875), 12. Proudhon repeatedly attacks Prosper Enfantin and his followers.

¹⁹ Cited in Stephen P. Walker, “Philanthropic Women and Accounting. Octavia Hill and the exercise of ‘quiet power and sympathy,’” *Accounting, Business and Financial History* 16 (2006): 163-194, quotation at 184. This preference for a female *conci rge* (in effect) was also extended to the management level by Hill (1838-1912), who managed workers’ housing in London for Ruskin.

moved readily between indoor and outdoor spaces.²⁰ Gréville's novel draws on this, within its Parisian setting, to give a sense of independence and active living to her characters:

Les jardinets étaient néanmoins pleins de travailleurs affairés; pas d'enclos qui n'eût au moins un laboureur s'escrimant avec une bêche, un herseur retournant la semence avec un râteau, et deux ou trois enfants pleins de bonne volonté, qui eussent volontiers mis tout sens dessus dessous, mais que la vue de leur père laboureur retenait dans les bornes d'une sagesse bien pensante. Les mères descendaient plus tard; elles étaient toutes occupées à mettre en ordre leur logis. (CM, 42)

The little gardens were nonetheless filled with busy workers; not one allotment was without at least one toiler going flat-out with a spade, another drawing furrows with a rake, and two or three very helpful children who would willingly have turned everything topsy-turvy, but who were held within the bounds of diligent good behaviour by the sight of their industrious father. The mothers came down later; they were all busy putting their lodging in order.

The "realism" of both novels is clearly selective, and designed in each case to fit the writer's wider purpose. The common points outlined earlier with regard to characters are also points of difference, as is the variation in the use and meaning of spaces, both internal and external. It is difficult, therefore, to say whether Zola or Gréville is the more realistic, or even the less sentimental, if by sentimental we mean manipulative of the reader's emotions. Gréville, while arguably reproducing the "ange du foyer" (angel of the hearth) cliché to some extent, also empowers both Cécile and her co-workers in so doing. Far from being prisoners of an inner space guarded by a Cerberus-like *portière*, the majority of her characters of both genders move readily on both sides of the threshold.

Despite the continued popularity of Zola's work and the near disappearance of Gréville from the literary scene, at least one reader of the time judged the latter's depictions to be highly realistic. As Gréville herself recounts, an American was moved by *Cité Ménard* to donate 5,000 francs to improving the lot of the "classes inférieures" (inferior classes), a generous response to an author who prided herself, as she explains, on telling things "comme elles sont, avec leurs mérites et leurs défauts" (Just as they are, with their merits and their defects)²¹ – with a realism less influenced by some larger, more pessimistic purpose.

Is *Cité Ménard* merely a "ladyfied" version of *L'Assommoir*? It must be admitted that it is, to some degree, a parallel rewriting, but I would argue that it goes further than mere sentimentalised imitation and also offers a corrective to aspects of Zola's dark vision, affirming the power of women's influence, yet without entirely serving the often misogynistic discourse of separate, gendered spheres.

²⁰ Arguably, though, with regard to the essentially urban *flâneur*, the garden represents a rural rather than a city space. *Cité Ménard* does however contain examples of female *flâneuses* on family excursions within Paris (CM, 88-89, for instance).

²¹ Henry Gréville, "Cinq mille francs" (1889) in *Un peu de ma vie* (Paris, 1897), 148.