

CHARACTERS IN 19TH C NOVEL

YOUR NEW FRIENDS



From: La Fortune des Rougons

Aristide, the youngest son, was, so to speak, diametrically opposed to Eugène. He had his mother's face, and a covetousness and slyness of character prone to trivial intrigues, in which his father's instincts predominated. Nature has need of symmetry. Short, with a pitiful countenance suggesting the knob of a stick carved into a Punch's head, Aristide ferreted and fumbled everywhere, without any scruples, eager only to gratify himself. He loved money as his eldest brother loved power. While Eugène dreamed of bending a people to his will, and intoxicated himself with visions of future omnipotence, the other fancied himself ten times a millionaire, installed in a princely mansion, eating and drinking to his heart's content, and enjoying life to the fullest possible extent. Above all things, he longed to make a rapid fortune.



castle

When he was building his castles in the air, they would rise in his mind as if by magic; he would become possessed of tons of gold in one night. These visions agreed with his indolence, as he never troubled himself about the means, considering those the best which were the most expeditious. In his case the race of the Rougons, of those coarse, greedy peasants with brutish appetites, had matured too rapidly; every desire for material indulgence was found in him, augmented threefold by hasty education, and rendered the more insatiable and dangerous by the deliberate way in which the young man had come to regard their realisation as his set purpose.

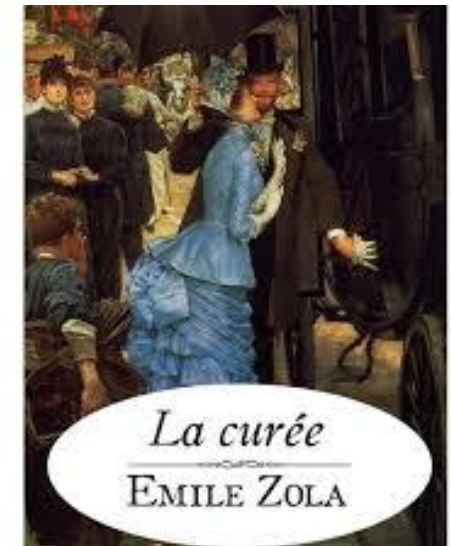
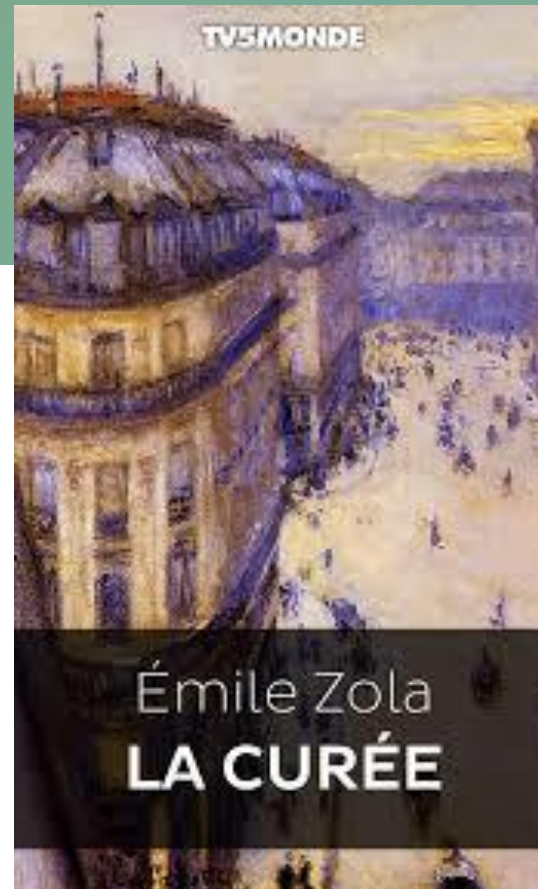
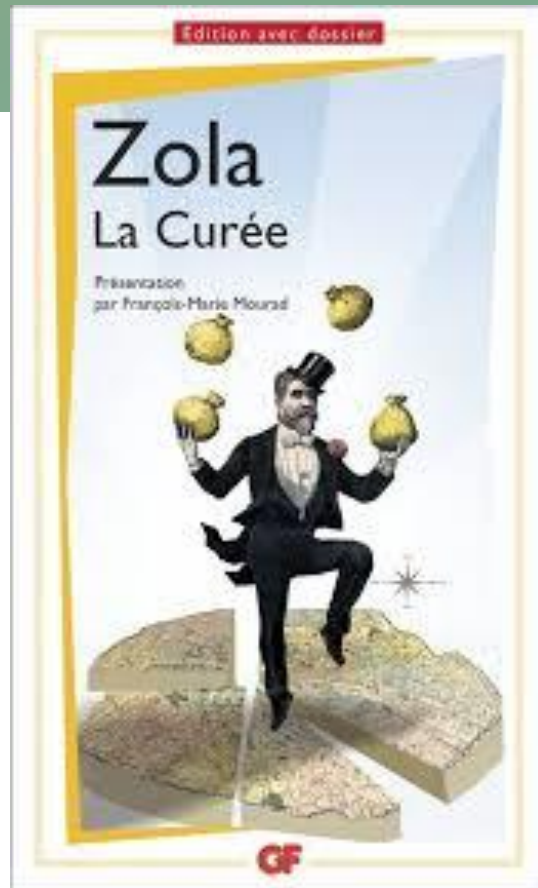
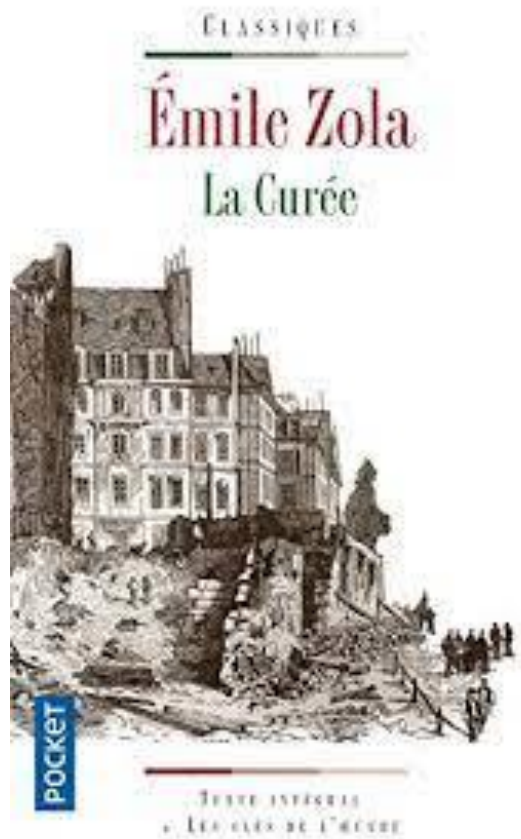
Aristide in Paris

In Paris he led a low, idle life; he was one of those students who enter their names at the taverns of the Quartier Latin. He did not remain there, however, more than two years; his father, growing apprehensive, and seeing that he had not yet passed a single examination, kept him at Plassans and spoke of finding a wife for him, hoping that domestic responsibility would make him more steady. Aristide let himself be married. He had no very clear idea of his own ambitions at this time; provincial life did not displease him; he was battenning in his little town—eating, sleeping, and sauntering about. Félicité pleaded his cause so earnestly that Pierre consented to board and lodge the newly-married couple, on condition that the young man should turn his attention to the business. From that time, however, Aristide led a life of ease and idleness.

It is necessary to have lived in the depths of the French provinces to form an idea of the four brutifying years which the young fellow spent in this fashion. In every little town there is a group of individuals who thus live on their parents, pretending at times to work, but in reality, cultivating idleness with a sort of religious zeal. Aristide was typical of these incorrigible drones. For four years he did little but play *écarté*. While he passed his time at the club, his wife, a fair-complexioned nerveless woman, helped to ruin the Rougon business by her inordinate passion for showy gowns and her formidable appetite, a rather remarkable peculiarity in so frail a creature. Angèle, however, adored sky-blue ribbons and roast beef. She was the daughter of a retired captain who was called Commander Sicardot, a good-hearted old gentleman, who had given her a dowry of ten thousand francs—all his savings. Pierre, in selecting Angèle for his son had considered that he had made an unexpected bargain, so lightly did he esteem Aristide.

The other son, Pascal, born between Eugène and Aristide, did not appear to belong to the family. He was one of those frequent cases which give the lie to the laws of heredity. During the evolution of a race nature often produces some one being whose every element she derives from her own creative powers. Nothing in the moral or physical constitution of Pascal recalled the Rougons. Tall, with a grave and gentle face, he had an uprightness of mind, a love of study, a retiring modesty which contrasted strangely with the feverish ambitions and unscrupulous intrigues of his relatives. After acquitting himself admirably of his medical studies in Paris, he had retired, by preference, to Plassans, notwithstanding the offers he received from his professors. He loved a quiet provincial life; he maintained that for a studious man such a life was preferable to the excitement of Paris. Even at Plassans he did not exert himself to extend his practice. Very steady, and despising fortune, he contented himself with the few patients sent him by chance.

Two days before his return to Paris, Eugène met his brother Aristide, on the Cours Sauvaire, and the latter accompanied him for a short distance with the importunity of a man in search of advice. As a matter of fact, Aristide was in great perplexity. Ever since the proclamation of the Republic, he had manifested the most lively enthusiasm for the new government. His intelligence, sharpened by two years' stay at Paris, enabled him to see farther than the thick heads of Plassans. He divined the powerlessness of the Legitimists and Orleanists, without clearly distinguishing, however, what third thief would come and juggle the Republic away. At all hazard he had ranged himself on the side of the victors, and he had severed his connection with his father, whom he publicly denounced as an old fool, an old dolt whom the nobility had bamboozled.



Renée

On the dreadful evening when Angèle died, Madame Sidonie had faithfully told in a few words the misfortune which had overtaken the Bérauds. The father, Monsieur Béraud Du Châtel, a fine old man of sixty, was the last representative of an ancient middle-class family, who could trace their origin much farther back than many a noble house.... He had been living, solitary and retired, in his mansion on the Île Saint-Louis, situated at the extremity of the island, His wife had died young. Some secret drama, the wound from which still remained unhealed, probably added to the gloom of the judge's grave countenance. He was already the father of a girl of eight, Renée, when his wife expired on giving birth to a second daughter.

.... Renée was forgotten at her school. During the holidays she filled the house with such an uproar that her aunt heaved a great sigh of relief when she at length escorted her back to the ladies of the Visitation, where the child had been a boarder since she was eight years old. She did not leave the convent for good until she was nineteen, and then she went to pass the summer at the home of her friend Adeline, whose parents owned a beautiful estate in the Nivernais. When she came back in October, her Aunt Élisabeth was surprised to find her very grave and profoundly sad. One evening she discovered her stifling her sobs in the pillow, writhing on her bed in an attack of mad grief. In the misery of her despair the child told her a most heart-rending story: a man of forty, rich, married, and whose wife, a young and charming person, was also staying at the house, had violated her during her visit in the country, without her daring or knowing how to defend herself.



The first interview was followed by an official visit which Aunt Élisabeth paid Saccard at his apartments in the Rue Payenne. ... The retired judge had refused to see "that man," as he called his daughter's seducer, so long as he was not married to Renée, to whom he had also closed his door. Madame Aubertot had full powers to arrange everything. She appeared delighted with the civil servant's luxurious surroundings; she had feared that the brother of that Madame Sidonie, with the dragged skirts, might be a blackguard. He received her, arrayed in a delicious dressing-gown. It was at the time, when the adventurers of the 2nd of December, after having paid their debts, were pitching their worn-out boots and frayed coats into the sewers, having their dirty chins shaved, and becoming respectable members of society. Saccard was at length joining the band; he took to cleaning his nails and using at his toilet the most invaluable powder and perfume.



The marriage was performed at the church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île. Saccard and Renée did not see each other until the eve of the great day. The interview took place in the evening, just at nightfall, in a low room of the Béraud mansion. They examined each other with curiosity. Since arrangements had been entered into for her marriage, Renée had regained her giddy ways, her light-heartedness. She was a tall girl of an exquisite though turbulent beauty, who had grown up at random amidst her school-girl caprices. She found Saccard little and ugly, but of a restless and intelligent ugliness which did not displease her; he was, moreover, perfect both in manners and conversation. He made a slight grimace on first seeing her; she no doubt appeared to him too tall, taller than he was himself. They exchanged a few words without embarrassment.

...Whilst Renée, luxuriously installed in the apartments in the Rue de Rivoli, in the very midst of that new Paris of which she was about to become one of the queens, was meditating on her future toilettes, and trying her hand at leading the life of a great lady of fashion, her husband was devoutly nursing his first great scheme. ...

...On leaving the Hôtel de Ville, Saccard, having a considerable amount of funds at his disposal, launched madly into speculation, whilst Renée, carried away by her intoxication, filled Paris with the clatter of her equipages, the sparkle of her diamonds, and the whirl of her noisy and adorable existence....

A servant had just brought him from the railway station, and he was in the large drawing-room, delighted with the gilding of the furniture and the ceiling, completely happy at sight of this luxury amid which he was going to live, when Renée, returning from her tailor's, swept in like a gust of wind. She threw off her hat and the white burnous which she had placed upon her shoulders to shield her from the cold, which was already keen; and she appeared before Maxime—stupefied with admiration—in all the glow of her marvellous costume.

The child thought she was disguised. Over a delicious skirt of blue faille with deep flounces, she wore a kind of *garde française* habit in pale grey silk. The lappets of the habit, lined with blue satin of a deeper shade than the faille of the skirt, were coquettishly caught up and secured with bows of ribbon; the cuffs of the tight sleeves, the broad facings of the bodice expanded on either side trimmed with the same satin. And, as a supreme seasoning, as a bold stroke of eccentricity, large buttons imitating sapphires, and fastened on blue rosettes, adorned the front of the habit in a double row. It was at once ugly and adorable.



The child was eating her with his eyes. This lady, with so white a skin, whose bosom could be seen through a gap of her plaited chemisette, this sudden and charming apparition with her hair raised high on her head, her gloved slender hands and her little masculine boots with pointed heels, delighted him; she seemed to be the good fairy of this warm gilded room. He began to smile, and he was just awkward enough in manner to retain his urchin-like gracefulness.

"Why, he is funny!" exclaimed Renée. "But how horrible! How they have cut his hair! Listen, my little fellow, your father will probably only come home for dinner and I shall be obliged to settle you here. I'm your stepmamma, sir. Will you kiss me?"

"Willingly," answered Maxime without any fuss; and he kissed the young wife on both cheeks, taking hold of her by the shoulders, whereby the *garde française* habit was a trifle crumpled.

She freed herself, laughing, and saying: "Dear me! how funny he is, the little shearling!" Then again approaching him and more serious: "We shall be friends sha'n't we? I want to be a mother to you. I reflected about it while I was waiting for my tailor, who was engaged, and I said to myself that I ought to be very kind and bring you up quite properly. I will be very nice!"

Maxime continued looking at her, with his blue, minx-like eyes, and suddenly: "How old are you?" he asked.

"But that is a question one never asks!" she exclaimed

Maxime's upbringing

The college of Plassans, a den of little bandits, like most provincial colleges, thus proved to be a hotbed of contamination in which Maxime's neutral temperament and childhood fraught with evil owing to some mysterious hereditary cause, were singularly developed. Fortunately age was about to alter him. But the trace of his childish abandonments, the effemination of his whole being, the time when he had thought himself a girl, were destined to remain in him and strike him for ever in his virility.

Renée called him "Mademoiselle," without knowing that six months earlier she would have spoken the truth. To her he seemed very obedient, very loving, and indeed his caresses often made her ill-at-ease. He had a manner of kissing that heated her skin. But what delighted her was his artfulness; he was exceedingly funny and bold, already speaking of women with a smile and holding his own against Renée's friends

Renée, who wished to consider the part she played as a mother and a schoolmistress a serious one, was delighted with her pupil. It is true that she neglected nothing to perfect his education. She was then passing through a period full of mortification and tears; a lover had abandoned her, in scandalous style in sight of all Paris, to attach himself to the Duchess de Sternich. She dreamt that Maxime would be her consolation, she made herself older, she endeavoured to be maternal, and became the most eccentric mentor that can be imagined.

The fine education that Maxime received had a first result. At seventeen the youngster seduced his stepmother's maid. The worst of the affair was that the girl found herself in the family way. It was necessary to send her into the country with the kid and make her a small allowance. Renée was terribly vexed by this adventure. Saccard occupied himself about it merely to settle the pecuniary side of the question; but the young woman roundly scolded her pupil. To think he should compromise himself with such a girl when she wanted to make a gentleman of him!

Charles Worth and French Fashion

He was so slightly built that the ladies did not think him more than fourteen. They amused themselves by intoxicating him with the illustrious Worms's Madeira, whereupon he said some astounding things which made them laugh till they cried. However it was the Marchioness d'Españet who hit upon the right remark for the circumstance. As Maxime was discovered one day, in a corner of the divan, behind her back

"That boy ought to have been a girl," she murmured, seeing him so rosy and blushing, so penetrated with the delight he had experienced at being close to her.

Then when the great Worms finally received Renée, Maxime followed her into the study.



Rachilde



THE JUGGLER

RACHILDE



*Introduction and translation by
Melanie C. Hawthorne*

THIS woman let her dress trail behind her like a queen trailing her life. She left the brightly lit hall, taking with her its darkness, draped by a thick shadow, by an air of impenetrable mystery that came right up to her neck and clasped it as though to strangle her. She took small steps, and the tail of black, full, supple material fanned out, rolled a wave around her, undulated, forming the same moiré circles that are seen in deep water in the evening, after a body has fallen. She walked with her head held high, her eyes lowered, her arms hanging by her side, not young in appearance, for she remained serious, and what showed above her funereal envelope seemed very artificial: a painted doll's face, decorated with a bonnet of smooth, shining hair with steely glints, hair that stuck to the temples, too twisted, too fine, so fine it seemed like imitation silk, a shred of her black dress, that satiny, almost metallic, sheath. With such a tight hairstyle set above

He felt such a strong desire to go up to her, such a brutal urge of instinct, that he took several more steps in spite of himself; he plunged his polished shoes into a mud puddle, reached the carriage door, put his hand on the handle, firmly resolved to prevent the horrible box from closing, to ravish its toy.

At that very moment, the man was split, he wanted, on the one hand, quite frantically *to look at her* again and, on the other hand, he was mentally calling himself a fool, thinking that she would give him some spare change, as one does to street urchins who run up to the carriage windows.

The woman drew aside the silk veiling her mouth, and she asked, quite naturally:

“Would you like to get in, my dear sir?”

Would he like to get in? Good heavens! His instinct alone answered. He bounded, settled into the dark silks, scattered the oriental lights, ravaged, with his muddy feet, the underlying foam, sat down and gestured in vexation:

“Excuse me, madam! Please accept my apologies,” he said, dazed by his own audacity, “I’m nothing but a fool, indeed. I step on your dress, I get into your carriage . . . I’m losing my head. What’s more, I have a migraine, these evening

brows met in a frown. She was making fun of him, that was becoming clear.

“Listen here, you insolent woman,” he muttered, taking her nervously by the shoulders. “I don’t think I love you, because I have no desire to coo like smitten lovers are supposed to. I want you, that’s all. I will have you, that’s for sure . . . as sure as you are an odious flirt . . . or a madwoman. I’ve been following you for three months, sometimes through salons where I twiddle my thumbs and get so bored I could scream, other times in the street, when you go out on foot . . . in other words not very often. I’ve been honorably discreet, I tried to chat this evening, after our solemn introduction at the buffet, back there. I have nothing to say to you, socially speaking. I’m not good at lying . . . and I think I’m your equal. Give me what I want and then throw me out, that will be fine with me. I probably will not come back. But don’t poison me any more with your pretty little systems. You’ll end up making me drink crushed glass. Thank you very much, but I’m not in a Chinese mood, and this kind of torture is getting on my nerves for nothing. I warn you that I’m not an agreeable young man. I’m not asking if you love me. Don’t give me your heart, sick or healthy, my proud, beautiful madame, politeness

Eliante?

She stood up, letting slip the multicolored shawl, her flag of adventure, and seemed blacker, taller:

"Now it's my turn, listen to me, my . . . dear child . . . and don't hurt me for nothing. I'm free to choose the time and even to not want to at all. I'm capricious, bored, in enough pain to fear an increase of physical or moral suffering. I seek only peace and oblivion. You have come to keep me company thus far . . . honorably. You will return . . . without me. Such things happen in the best of worlds. One has supper and retires. I find it absurd that a man cannot have an intimate chat with a woman . . . even one he loves. I receive you as my guest in fact because I like you . . . so what?"

"An actress!" he sneered. "I know the farce I am supposed to act; throw myself on my knees and swear that I'm happy! Never. I can't. I'm drawn to you by a different curiosity from the one that draws little snobs. I'm not amused by the manners of *high society where one is bored*. Here, Eliante, I'm going to confess to you my real curiosity, the idea of a future doctor of medicine. I think you have leprosy, I'm taking exact note of

With such a husband Renée was about as little married as she could be. She remained for whole weeks almost without seeing him. On the other hand he was perfect; he threw his cash-box wide open for her. In point of fact, she liked him as she would have liked an obliging banker.

Renée was kneeling, leaning over Maxim with fixed eyes and a brutish attitude which frightened him. With her hair down and her shoulders bare, she was resting herself on her fists, with her figure stretched out, and looking like a huge cat with phosphorescent eyes. Above the shoulders of this adorable, amorous animal gazing at him, the young fellow, lying on his back, perceived the marble sphinx, with her glistening hips lighted by the moon. Renée had the attitude and the smile of the feminine-headed monster, and in her loosened skirts, she looked like the white sister of this black deity.

Maxime remained supine. ... A warm humidity covered the lovers with a kind of dew, an ardent sweat. For a long time they remained motionless and speechless in this bath of flame, Maxime flat and inert, Renée quivering on her wrists as on supple nervous hams.

They passed a night of mad love. Renée was the man, the passionate acting will. Maxime submitted. What with his lank limbs, his graceful slimness, like that of a Roman youth, this neutral, fair-haired pretty being, stricken in his virility since childhood, became a big girl in the young woman's inquisitive arms. He seemed to have been born and to have grown up for a perversion of love. Renée enjoyed her domination, and with her passion she bent this creature, whose sexuality always seemed indeterminate. For her it was a constant astonishment of desire, a surprise of the senses, a strange sensation of uncomfortableness and acute pleasure. She no longer knew what he was; and she thought doubtfully of his fine skin, his fleshy neck, his abandonment and fainting fits. She then enjoyed an hour of repletion.