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Claire White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture: Time, Politics and Class*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014. 246 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-137-37306-9.

Review by Elizabeth Emery, Montclair State University.

The 2006 youth protests against the *Contrat première embauche* and the 2014 CGT and FO walkouts on the third *Conférence sociale pour le travail* provide vivid examples of the extent to which the regulation of work continues to dominate the French cultural landscape. Claire White's *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture* contributes a new and fascinating, if idiosyncratic, chapter to our knowledge of French attitudes toward labor and leisure. This is not a classic history of labor reform, but rather, as the author puts it in her introduction, an attempt to situate art and literature within this well-studied context by focusing primarily on the representation of work and leisure in the novels of Emile Zola, the poetry of Jules Laforgue, and the paintings of Maximilien Luce. The book's title should not be interpreted as a study of the representation of work and leisure in literature and visual culture *in general*, but in the specific case of these three artists, each of whom "engages with discourses of labour and leisure in a way which is both highly self-conscious and which reveals something about his own understanding of the processes, values and politics of cultural work in the early Third Republic" (p. 41).

White sets out clear parameters for this ambitious project and her arguments are convincing within the framework she has established. Her focus lies squarely on representations of male artisans and factory workers in Paris as they are imagined at work and at leisure by nineteenth-century French philosophers, writers, and artists who, in turn, shape their own depictions of the artist at work as a function of such discourse. "The aim of this book is to assess a largely unstudied dimension of this familiar narrative: the importance of the changing practices and politics of labour and leisure to cultural production, and the often critical engagement of artists and writers with this particular strand of social and political history" (p. 2). The book is not about agricultural work or women's work or bourgeois and aristocratic leisure, nor does it provide a history of labor relations or economics. Rather, it privileges close readings of specific artistic representations in order to point to "new connections between the history of mass labour and leisure and the history of the work of art" (p. 3). Although concentrated on Zola, Laforgue, and Luce, White displays tremendous erudition and command of nineteenth-century thought as she draws in thinkers as disparate as George Sand and Edmond de Goncourt, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Pierre Kropotkin, and Karl Marx.

The introduction is a chapter unto itself, a concentrated overview of the concept of work (*travail*) from the Greeks through the twentieth century via Blaise Pascal, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Proudhon, Sand, Louis Blanc, Flora Tristan, Marx and Engels, Arthur Schopenhauer, Paul Lafargue, Theodor Adorno, Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Baudrillard, and Pierre Bourdieu. She moves from the eighteenth-century French revalorization of work as worthwhile in itself and continues through Revolutionary attitudes to work, early nineteenth-century debates focused on property rather than privilege, the workers' movement of the 1830s and 1840s and the "droit au travail," and on to the worker movements of the 1860s, the strikes of the 1870s and late 1880s, and

the “droit à la paresse,” and finally to the ten-hour and then eight-hour workday. Relying heavily on the work of Kristin Ross, White argues for the Commune as fundamental for workers’ rights because of the anxieties it inspired between different forms of Republicanism.[1] She depicts the Early Third Republic as a moment critical for debates and policies related to class, freedom, and rights.

In the introduction, White also sets out her primary argument, that the strands of utopianism and pessimism endemic to the nineteenth-century imagination were inextricable from the vocabulary and politics of work and leisure (p. 2) and that art lay at their center; it was a participant in the “model of alienation” or a “mode of creative labor and aesthetic enjoyment” (p. 2). The book thus analyzes representations of workers at leisure while showing how debates about work and leisure (and their terminology) played an essential role in the formation of late nineteenth-century artistic self-conceptions. Zola, to whom she devotes two of the four chapters, is a key figure throughout the book because his career bridges both dystopian and utopian thought. From the fratricide of *Germinal* to the socialization of capitalism inherent in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and to the idealism of his little-discussed novel, *Travail*, he traces the changing figure of the worker, from tradesman to aggressive and mobilized factory proletarian.

Chapter one, “Workers at Play in Zola’s *Les Rougon-Macquart*,” examines well-known Zola novels through twentieth-century sociologies of leisure (notably those of Henri Lefebvre and Theodor Adorno), “exploring the ways in which the aesthetic and conceptual underpinnings of the Naturalist project intersect with a twentieth-century mode of culture critique” (p. 41). White’s fine close readings of passages in which Zola’s urban workers seek out leisurely pastimes, suggest that the Naturalist author’s critique of this “programmed” free time prefigured the critiques of the leisure industry made by Lefebvre, Adorno, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu (p. 48), particularly in their mediation by artistic and textual expectations. Indeed, her reading of an “erotics of leisure” (p. 58) in which the fantasies of free time and the freedom of working bodies conflict with the alienation and control of working bodies is particularly fresh and interesting and complements Susan Harrow’s recent work on Zolian bodies.[2] White also points out the ambivalence at the heart of Zola’s portrayals of working-class enjoyment where leisure often leads to sexual relations, haunted by the specter of the labor necessary to feed ever more children (p. 63).

Chapter two, “Dominical Diversions: Laforgue on Sundays,” reads Laforgue’s poems about Sundays contained in his major collections, *Les Complaintes* (1885), *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté* (1890) and the *Derniers Vers* (1890), through the lens of philosophy, notably the pessimism of Pascal and Schopenhauer, and the psychological writings of Eduard von Hartmann. This chapter will be of tremendous value for Laforguean specialists because of its innovative focus on the poet’s representation of the “endless and futile alternation of work and distraction” under industrial modernity. For White, Sundays are emblematic of Laforgue’s philosophical pessimism, a prefiguration of existentialism (p. 78), but even more importantly, writing about the Sabbath becomes, for Laforgue, an aesthetic. His dilemma over celebrating Sunday or working turns inward to the act of writing (p. 105).

The cleverly titled chapter three, “Beyond the Leisure Principle: Luce and Neo-Impressionism,” evokes male artisans at rest in domestic settings painted by Post-Impressionist artist Maximilien Luce in the 1880s and 1890s. This is a critical chapter not just because it moves the argument from literature to art, but also because it shifts more distinctly into the politics of class through Luce’s perceived role as member of the proletariat (in counter distinction to the marked bourgeois perspectives of Zola and Laforgue). While there is a great body of art historical scholarship dedicated to Impressionist representations of leisure,[3] White focuses on Luce, a Post-Impressionist whose social status as a former engraver allows her to move into a discussion of leisure and class struggle filtered through the anarchist writings of Kropotkin and Jean Grave. Citing Roslyn Roslak, who has argued for the importance of the anarchist movement for the Neo-Impressionist aesthetic as a whole,[4] White reads Luce’s decision to situate the worker in domestic spaces as a validation of the workers’ humanity and

mental reflection (p. 155), a “radical” choice in comparison to the many representations of inebriated or sweaty pickaxe-wielding laborers in the works of other artists. This chapter deals extensively with artistic depictions of workers, not just by Luce, but also by Jules Breton, Jean-François Raffaëlli, George Seurat, and Paul Signac.

In chapter four, “Work and Pleasure: Zola’s *Travail*,” White questions the “irrepressibly optimistic vision of twentieth-century labor politics” (p. 41) promoted by Zola in his 1901 novel, *Travail*, especially in contrast to his earlier denial of such rosy pictures in the works she discussed in chapter one. She convincingly explains this seemingly puzzling shift not just as an older, more complacent Zola’s dreaminess (as others have argued), but rather as a calculated effort to influence contemporary politics, to provide a compromise to the anarchist thought that he saw as particularly dangerous for French society. For Zola it might be possible to “overcome the alienation that is held to characterise modern, industrial labor” (p. 141) by embracing communal work as pleasurable (p. 159). In *Travail* White thus sees Zola as returning to a “politics of idealism,” the term Naomi Schor used to refer to George Sand’s often pragmatic writings, an idealism that explains the warm reception Zola’s novel found in socialist circles (pp. 161, 170-71).<sup>[5]</sup>

Nonetheless, in his shift from support of the masses in *Germinal*, to an idealization of individuals and their initiative in *Travail*, manual labor is “occluded” as “bourgeois ease [becomes the] logical objective of social progress” (p. 177). In *Travail* everyone has achieved bourgeois comfort and Zola has slipped into the same kind of totalitarian discourse he so roundly criticized as a young man in the works of Proudhon and others (p. 189). This chapter will be extremely valuable to Zola specialists because it provides a persuasive and nuanced reading of what has long been considered a puzzling novel. In this chapter and her conclusion White masterfully shows the importance of this work as a response to specific political and social conditions in turn-of-the-century France, the idealism of *Travail* serving as an alternative to anarchist philosophy, taking pleasure in work and art as an alternative to crippling labor strikes (p. 193).

It is hoped that this necessarily incomplete summary of the rich and nuanced discussion that takes place within each chapter will reveal something of the ambitious and wide-ranging nature of this interdisciplinary book and the choices White has made in focusing on Zola, Laforgue, and Luce and their contributions to theories of work and leisure. These often brilliant close readings are the book’s greatest strength, particularly for specialists of Zola and Laforgue and for those interested in the political and philosophical underpinnings of the Neo-Impressionist aesthetic. Those readers seeking comprehensive historical information about work and leisure in late nineteenth-century French culture will, however, likely wish for more justification of the choice of these three “suggestive examples,” when there are so many others that could have been chosen, as well as for more sustained distinction among the terms used (“work,” “labor,” “toil,” “leisure,” “Sabbath”). Nonetheless, White’s elegant prose and negotiation of complex ideas invite curiosity about the topic. The book will inspire many other literary and art historical scholars to examine the ways in which the political vocabulary related to labor and leisure in the 1880s and 1890s determined other artists’ understanding and representation of their own practices.

*Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture: Time, Politics and Class* makes an original and thought-provoking contribution to the growing bibliography of interdisciplinary works dedicated to politics, leisure, and the arts during the early Third Republic, including classics such as Roger Shattuck’s *The Banquet Years* and Charles Rearick’s *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque* as well as more recent additions such as Gabriel Weisberg’s *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* and Richard Thomson’s *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900*.<sup>[6]</sup> White elegantly reveals the extent to which Zola, Laforgue, and Luce participated in debates about work and leisure and reflected those debates back into the creation of their own work.

## NOTES

[1] Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Commune* (London: Verso, 2008).

[2] Susan Harrow, *Zola, The Body Modern: Pressures and Prospects of Representation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

[3] See, for example, Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988); Clayson Hollis, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991); T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[4] Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[5] Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[6] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*; Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Gabriel Weisberg *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

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