

The Masterpiece

ÉMILE ZOLA

Read by **Leighton Pugh**

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Perhaps the most autobiographical of Zola's Rougon-Macquart cycle of novels, *The Masterpiece* is a hard, bleak and raw portrait of unrecognised artistic genius. Claude Lantier, brother to Nana and son of Gervaise, is a struggling painter who dreams of conquering Paris's art scene with his revolutionary 'open air' style of painting. Discouraged and mocked, Claude retreats to the countryside with a young woman from Clermont, with whom he has fallen in love, before returning to Paris, where he continues to experience rejection at every turn. Zola's depiction of a frustrated artist is said to have drawn heavily on the real-life experiences of Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne, the latter of whom broke off his friendship with the author upon reading the novel.



Leighton Pugh trained at LAMDA, after studying Modern Languages at Queen's College, Oxford. Radio work includes the plays *Murder by the Book* and *Scenes from Provincial Life* for BBC Radio 4 and the voice of Heinrich von Kleist in the BBC Radio 3 documentary *The Tragical Adventure of Heinrich von Kleist*. Leighton has been in five productions for the National Theatre, most recently *The Lehman Trilogy* (NT Live 2018–19, New York, West End). For Naxos AudioBooks he has recorded *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Zola's *Germinal*, *Nana* and *L'Assommoir*, and featured in Walton's *The Compleat Angler*.



Total running time: 15:35:07

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1 The Masterpiece		
2 But it was all over. There were only...	11:32	25 A few days later, however, he received another shock...
3 With a light step, Claude ran to take his box...	10:58	26 Still, Christine glided into the habit of the thing...
4 'Mine's Claude.' And, having looked at her just at...	10:47	27 The recollection of the morning after the storm...
5 Amidst the din he had thus raised...	12:01	28 Chapter 5
6 Chapter 2	10:35	29 And he affected to be in no hurry...
7 There were others still: Spontini, the ferocious usher...	11:33	30 Claude, whose spirits had revived amidst that...
8 They had even planned an encampment...	11:02	31 He sprang forward and freed Régine...
9 Dealing sabre-like strokes at the velveteen jacket...	11:33	32 'Just look at them, you'd think they were at...'
10 Sandoz shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of...	9:46	33 There was general astonishment when Fagerolles...
11 He stretched his legs apart, high upon the cushions...	11:40	34 Chapter 6
12 Pausing near the door, before the studies...	7:00	35 June was drawing to a close, and the rain fell...
13 Chapter 3	8:00	36 During the earlier months they only once met some...
14 After drawing breath, Claude retraced his steps...	11:09	37 Besides, she thought his more recent pictures...
15 They at once turned into the Rue du Cherche-Midi.	11:23	38 They lunched in the kitchen, and an extraordinary...
16 At last they all began to talk, with the exception of...	11:00	39 When Jacques fell asleep, there were endless...
17 When they reached the Esplanade des Invalides...	10:43	40 Chapter 7
18 'You're all painters, aren't you? How funny!'	11:22	41 All the same, he stopped for another few minutes...
19 'Hello! He has missed his party,' teased Fagerolles.	8:46	42 They changed the conversation; the high prices that...
20 Fagerolles himself, cynical Parisian though he might...	11:27	43 Bongrand looked at him again, straight in the eyes.
21 Chapter 4	11:18	44 "'You've real genius, my dear fellow. Your last...'"
22 Christine that day wore a large cloak...	11:28	45 'Your wife is charming,' said Claude, 'and I see...'
23 She was seized once more with the vertigo...	11:22	46 A dream of eternal friendship made him changeless.
24 Since the nipping colds of December...	11:57	47 Towards eleven o'clock Dubuche, arriving at last...
	9:25	48 Chapter 8
		11:03

49	In the background the Tuileries vanished...	10:50	68	Claude at once recognised the people who had...	9:40
50	Christine at last began to grow frightened...	11:42	69	'Good morning, dear master,' said Naudet...	11:48
51	'Are you coming, Claude?' asked Christine, gently.	10:19	70	However, the painter had a gleam of hope.	10:21
52	It was getting late; Christine wanted to put him to...	11:33	71	Sandoz and Claude had to eat, seated obliquely...	9:36
53	Under the eyes of their artist creator...	10:42	72	Sandoz had at last obtained two cups of coffee...	8:10
54	But all at once Claude grew uneasy.	9:47	73	Precisely at that moment they perceived Mahoudeau...	7:42
55	Chapter 9	11:36	74	Chapter 11	11:20
56	Twice already had he failed to be ready for the Salon...	11:55	75	Sandoz, finding him nervous in the railway carriage...	11:39
57	At first there was a silent struggle of every minute.	8:05	76	They alone existed now amid his finished existence...	11:25
58	And it was then that Christine, finding herself...	11:36	77	'Do you know, old fellow,' said the novelist...	9:35
59	It was poverty, however, that finally finished off Claude.	10:59	78	Claude and Christine were the first to arrive.	11:27
60	She listened, and staggered in her very grief.	10:15	79	Claude, who for a little while had been absorbed...	11:43
61	Sandoz, silent, felt despair steal over him...	11:11	80	'It was Claude who did for us!' so Gagnière squarely...	11:55
62	He paused, and silence reigned once more...	13:34	81	Christine having risen in her turn, and apologised for...	11:20
63	Chapter 10	11:49	82	Chapter 12	10:39
64	At four o'clock in the afternoon, when the voting...	10:39	83	She had placed the candle on the platform...	11:53
65	Then the work began again, but more agreeably...	10:23	84	Claude had hanged himself from the steps in front...	11:18
66	This general revision was the terrible part of the task.	11:21	85	However, the painter and the novelist now had to...	10:26
67	Then Claude began to look for his own picture.	11:53	86	'It was fated,' he mused in an undertone.	11:00

Translated by Ernest Alfred Vizetelly (updated by Leighton Pugh)

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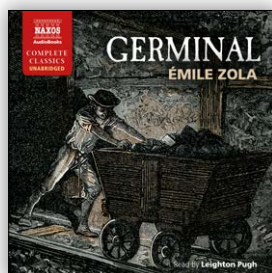
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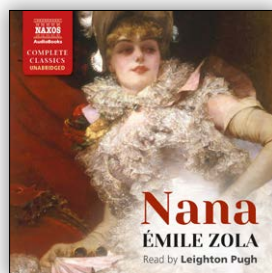
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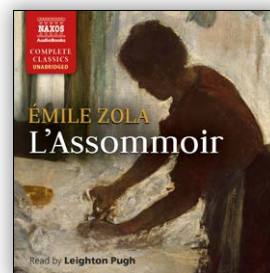
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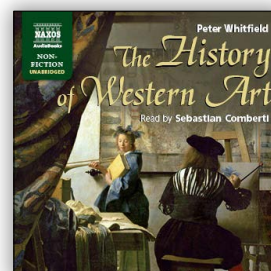
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