

## **The Politics of Film Adaptation in Zola's *La Bête Humaine***

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In 1890, Emile Zola published a book called *La Bête Humaine*. The novel is essentially a psychological thriller whose story features three very dynamic characters: a train station master Roubaud, his wife Séverine, and her lover Jacques Lantier. The conflict that ensues is one of murder and deceit – and the motivations of the characters are similarly unclear and compromised. Therefore, this story can potentially be interpreted in multiple ways, providing important political commentary for their receiving audiences. It follows that when a series of film adaptations re-created the story on screen, they did so in drastically different ways. Two particular adaptations did this especially effectively: *La Bête Humaine* (1938), a French film directed by Jean Renoir; and *Human Desire* (1954), a film directed in Chicago by Austrian director Fritz Lang. Although both films are based on the same novel, each has marked differences from the novel and from one another. Both representations of the novel are informed by the political climate of their respective time periods. Renoir's adaptation was influenced by the destruction and corruption of WWII in France, while Lang's shows clear traces of the effects of McCarthyism in the United States.

### *Information about the Author:*

Reillie Acks is majoring in French, economics, and mathematics. She first wrote this paper for her Senior Seminar French class which focused on film adaptations of French literature. Essentially, she researched the idea of translation – into different languages as well as different mediums. Since she wants to use French studies for her future career goals, she is very intrigued by the idea of the translatability and communicability of languages and ideas in any medium.

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