

## *Emile Zola*

Author of the ‘naturalist’ novel ‘Germinal’, in which he describes the game of crosse.

Emile Zola, son of an Italian civil engineer and a French mother, was born on 2 April 1840 in Paris, but spent most of his childhood and youth in Aix-en-Provence. He moved to Paris in 1858 with his widowed mother. They suffered hardship for several years. In the late 60’s, he began to gain recognition as an opposition journalist and as author of ‘Thérèse Raquin’.



In 1885, he wrote the novel ‘Germinal’.

Zola’s famous intervention in the ‘Dreyfus affair’, particularly the publication of the book ‘J’accuse’ in 1898, led to his prosecution and persecution, forcing him into a year of voluntary exile in England.

He died of carbon monoxide poisoning (by accident, or as many suspect because of foul play) in 1902 from the fumes of a blocked chimney in his Paris apartment.

### *Parts of ‘Germinal’ in which the game of crosse is described.*

... But they stopped to gaze at Zacharie and Mouquet, who, after having drunk a glass with two more mates, had begun their big game of crosse. The stake was a new cap and a red handkerchief, deposited with Rasseneur. The four players, two against two, were bidding for the first turn from the Voreux to the Paillot farm, nearly three kilometres; and it was Zacharie who won, with seven strokes, while Mouquet required eight. They had placed the ball, the little boxwood egg, on the pavement with one end up. Each was holding his crosse, the mallet with its bent iron, long handle and tight strung network. Two o’clock struck as they set out, Zacharie, in a masterly manner, at his first stroke, composed of a series of three, sent the ball more than four hundred yards across the beetroot fields; for it was forbidden to play in the villages and on the streets, where people might be killed. Mouquet, who was also a good player, sent off the ball with so vigorous a shot, that his single stroke brought the ball a hundred and fifty metres behind. And the game went on, backwards and forwards, always running, their feet bruised by the frozen ridges of the ploughed fields.

---

... The players were now at their fourth turn. From the Paillot farm they had gone off to the Quatre-Chemins, then from the Quatre-Chemins to Montoire; and now they were going in six strokes from Montoire to Pré-des-Vaches. That made two leagues and a half in an hour; and, besides, they had had drinks at the Vincent and at the Trois-Sages Bar. Mouquet this time was ahead. He had two more strokes to play and his victory was certain, when Zachary, grinning as he availed himself of his privilege, played with so much skill that the ball rolled into a deep pit. Mouquet's partner could not get it out; it was a disaster. All four shouted; the party was exited, for they were neck and neck; they had to begin again. From the Pré-des-Vaches it was less than two kilometres to the point of Herbes-Rousses in five strokes. There they would refresh themselves at Lerenard's.

... Zacharie, Mouquet and the two others were covering the kilometres, with no other rest than the time for a drink at all the inns, which they had fixed on as their goals. From the Herbes-Rousses they had gone on to Buchy, then to Croix-de-Pierre, then to Chamblay. The earth rang beneath the helter-skelter of their feet, rushing untiringly after the ball, which bounded over the ice; the weather was good, they did not fall in; they only ran the risk of breaking their legs. In the dry air the great crosse strokes exploded like firearms. Their muscular hands grasped the strung handle; their entire bodies were bent forward, as though to slay an ox. And this went on for hours, from one end of the plain to the other, over ditches and hedges and the slopes of the road, the low walls of the enclosures. You need to have good bellows in your chest and iron hinges in your knees. The pike men thus rubbed off the rust of the mine with impassioned zeal. There were some so enthusiastic at twenty-five, that they could do ten leagues. At forty they played no more; they were too heavy.

Five o'clock struck; twilight was already coming on. One more turn to the forest of Vandame to decide who had won the cap and the handkerchief. And Zacharie joked with his ironic indifference to politics; it would be fine to tumble down over there in the midst of his mates

... Almost at the same minute, Zacharie, Mouquet and the two others, with their last stroke at crosse, drove the ball within a few metres of the glade. They all came into the midst of the meeting.

*(Edited by David Baguleu, based on a translation by Havelock Ellis and Edith Lees; The Everyman Library, London, 1933)*

---