



In 1744, during the War of the Austrian Succession, Louis XV became ill in Metz and promised to rebuild the Sainte-Geneviève church (which for almost a thousand years had been associated with the patron saint of Paris and France) if he heals. On September 6, 1764, nearly 20 years later, the first stone was placed by the king himself. The construction is entrusted to the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot who decided to go for a Greek cross plan overlooked by a triple dome for the church. To finance the work of the Pantheon, a national lottery was organized raising 400,000 Books. Soufflot had imagined a gigantic building but died before the end of his work. The objective of the project was to compete with two other religious institutions, St. Paul’s Cathedral in London and St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Soufflot is inspired by the facade of the Pantheon of Agrippa in Rome to construct the Parisian Pantheon. Originally, the French were impressed by the Neoclassical style of the building but remained little convinced of its strength. The French were afraid that the dome would fall, because stones crumbled. To consolidate this monument, it was necessary to wait until Napoleon and his seizure of power to see renovation work mainly on the pillars of the dome. The church was completed in 1790 by his collaborator, Maximilien Brébion, and his student, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet. However, the French Revolution modified the Pantheon, into a place to honor great men. Over the course of political regimes, the Pantheon changed function no less than 6 times: from time to time, it would be a church, or a republican temple. Napoleon gave back the building to the church but kept the crypt for distinguished people. It was only in 1885, with Victor Hugo’s funeral, that the Pantheon definitively regained its function as a republican temple of the great men and women of the nation.



His name is associated with Dreyfus’s case:

In May 1896, Zola published an article in Le Figaro denouncing anti-Semitism, entitled For the Jews. He had just completed Paris, the last episode of his trilogy of the Three Cities, in which he staged Drumon’s “liberty of parole” under the title La Voix du Peuple. Three meetings were decisive in Zola’s commitment to Dreyfus: including the journalist Bernard Lazare, who had supported Mathieu Dreyfus since February 1895, the lawyer of Picquart, Master Leblois, and finally the Vice-President of the Senate, Scheurer-Kestner. This latter plays a key role, because he seeks to constitute a council of men accustomed to talk about the Masses. It was after a lunch with these three men that Zola engaged in the Dreyfus’s affair, publishing three articles in Le Figaro from November 1897. He defended the positions of Scheurer- Kestner (M. Scheurer-Kestner), denouncing anti-Semitism and the myth of the Jewish federation (“ The trade union”), and finally, he focused on describing the circumstances of the matter (The official report). Disowned by the readers of Le Figaro who threatened to unfollow him, but he continued his action in two brochures, published by Fasquelle; they are presented under the form of open letters, « À la jeunesse» and « À la France ». The Dreyfusard’s campaign forced the government to lead the commander Esterhazy in front of the war council of Paris, at the very moment when the President of the Council Jules Méline proclaimed “There is no Dreyfus’s affair”. Esterhazy was acquitted on January 11, 1898, and carried in triumph by his supporters.



It is a shock for Zola and his companions. « J’accuse... ». The greatest revolutionary act of the century. On January 13, 1898, newspaper sellers distributed 300,000 issues of the Aurora in Paris. The daily director, Clemenceau, found the title, and acted by the way of an indictment. The effect is considerable: according to Léon Blum, « J’accuse... » will shake Paris in one day. As the content of the article is commensurate with its deliberately provocative title: spread over six columns throughout the first page and the second, the article first exposes the facts, the arrest and conviction of Dreyfus; ending with the revelation of the real culprit. He continued by adding that Commander Esterhazy had denounced the scandalous decision that had taken two days with the acquittal of the traitor. Zola is fully aware of the risk he is running into, and he voluntarily exposes himself to prosecution, because he believes that a new trial will reopen for Dreyfus’s case; "That they dare call me into an assize court". Émile Zola gave a new dimension to the Dreyfus affair. He became the symbol of all hatred, of all injustices, all mistakes and all fanaticism, as historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet declared. Convinced of Dreyfus’s innocence, disgusted by Esterhazy’s acquittal

the author of the note, he violently attacked all those who had responsibility in the case. He transfigures a historical event... into a mythical event. His commitment paved the way for the commitment of intellectuals to the fight for Freedom and Truth. This affair revealed the deep fractures of a still fragile Republic regarding anti-Semitic currents.



Today, the Pantheon is home to several personalities who called or echoed Dreyfus's case, like Jean Jaurès, a socialist politician who was convinced of Dreyfus’s innocence and used his voice and writings to defend truth and justice. His commitment helped mobilize public opinion and obtain the review of the trial. He obtained funding to transfer Zola’s ashes to Barrès: “Gentlemen, they are asking us 35,000 francs to carry Zola to the Pantheon. I would say that we will never have a better opportunity to save money.” Jean Zay can also be associated with this case by the injustice he himself experienced and his conviction on the basis of false accusations and political manipulations because of his convictions and his identity. Like Pierre Brossolette, who entered the Pantheon in May 2015, each having contributed to the defense of values of emancipation and truth that the Dreyfus affair had put to the test.

Emile Zola died on the night of September 29, 1902, at home in Paris, the cause of his death being a practical failure on his chimney. The national and international press showed their condolences to this novelist while others such as La Croix or La Libre Parole go as far to launch rumors of suicide. Alexandrine, Zola’s widow, advised Alfred Dreyfus not to go to the funeral that took place on October 5 th , as there would be a lot of tensions. Dreyfus, however, attended the funeral prayer written and delivered by Anatole France.



Zola is buried in the Panthéon as a great man of letters and political alongside Voltaire, Alexandre Dumas and Jean Moulin. The 13 th of July 1906, the French parliament created a law reinstating Alfred Dreyfus in the army with the rank of battalion commander and, on the same day, called for Zola's ashes to be transferred to Panthéon.



The official ceremony took place on the 4 of June. Just as it was about to end, two shots rang out. Grigori, a journalist working for Le Gaulois newspaper, had just shot Alfred Dreyfus, who was only slightly wounded in the arm. The perpetrator of the attack was quickly arrested and declared that he had not been able to bear the humiliation inflicted on the French army. He was quickly judged and acquitted afterwards.

