

Graham King

When I first met Graham King, standing in the queue on the stairs of the *Institut Français* waiting for the inaugural meeting of what was to become the Emile Zola Society, I had no idea who he was. I did not know that this affable but unassuming man was the author of *Garden of Zola. Emile Zola and his novels for English readers*. Nor did I know that he was the newspaper publisher Rupert Murdoch's marketing guru, being responsible for the *Sun* and *The Sunday Times* as we know them today. He was, however, to become a friend and, more importantly, a pillar of the new society and founding editor of its *Bulletin*.

Today, probably few of our members remember Graham personally (although his name constantly crops up and his work on Zola is often cited) but one cannot overstate the important role he played in the formation and development of the society. As well as editing and writing for the *Bulletin*, which originally published twice a year, he gave talks on English editions of Zola's novels and in 1999, at an international colloquium organized by the society, he spoke about Zola's reception in England. In October 1991, when the topic for discussion was *L'Argent*, only somebody of Graham's stature could produce the Deputy Editor of *The Sunday Times* as the main speaker.

Graham was an Australian, the son of an out-of-work railway worker, who grew up during the recession of the 1930s. He studied geology and mining at Adelaide University but his literary instincts came to the fore when he wrote a novel which was a thinly disguised account of the misery endured by his father's generation. He enjoyed recounting his first experience of Zola. When he was working at a mining camp in Northern Australia, facilities of a domestic nature were limited and the novel *Germinal* was used as lavatory paper. When Graham needed it, 36 pages had gone, so presumably he had some catching up to do. He was later to appear in *Private Eye's* Pseudos Corner: 'Graham King recalls how he first read Emile Zola down a coal mine'. Graham would have been amused and may even have inspired its appearance.

Published in 1978, at a time when few of Zola's novels were readily available in translation, Graham's *Garden of Zola* is now clearly out of date – he would have been delighted to see the number of new translations, including all of the Rougon-Macquart series as Oxford World's Classics – but it is nonetheless still cited by critics and is a useful aide-memoire for the early publishing history of Zola both in the United Kingdom and the United States. It is out of print, but copies do appear from time to time. That such a book could have been published at such a time is curious, and Graham himself said that without Rupert Murdoch's generous help he doubts whether the book would have existed.

Graham's time with us was too short. With issue number 4 of the *Bulletin* he announced that because of work pressures he would have to relinquish the editorship. He continued to support the society but unfortunately, he died of cancer in 1999. *The Times* carried a three-column

obituary and the March 2000 issue of *Bulletin* was dedicated to his memory, with Chantal Morel describing Graham's role in the birth of the Emile Zola Society, and with Nelly Wilson, one of our members, writing a tribute to him.

Keith Howell