

# The Life of Emile Zola (1937) kicks of the 2025 TCM 31 Days of Oscar

## Description

PostePaul Muni as a young, struggling Emile Zola.

*The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) kicked off the 2025 Turner Classic Movies annual â??31 Days of Oscar,â?• with an introduction from TCM host, Ben Mankiewicz. *The Life of Emile Zola* is set in Paris, 1862, signified by an extraordinary opening frame coupled with a Gothic alphanumeric text overlay. For his work Anton Grot received an Oscar nomination for Best Art Direction. Moreover, the impeccable mise-en-scen follows the storyâ??s timeline to a T within the trajectory of Zolaâ??s life. The film stars Paul Muni {*Scarface,* 1932) in the title role and is directed by William Dieterle (*The Life of Louis*

*Pasteur,* 1936). The film opens inside an artist loft containing French impressionist painter, Paul Cezanne, portrayed by Vladimir Sokoloff, and Zola, with a whimsical, non-diegetic score from Max Steiner, (nominated for Best Score, Music). Zola is in love with Paris and intends to write about her. Cezanne, on the other hand is much more pessimistic saying, â??itâ??s hopeless.â?•




The film leaps forward from where the opening loft scene ended with Alexandrine Zola, portrayed by Gloria Holden, announcing Zola came into a job that would allow him to marry. Zola imagined time to write, finishing his book and publishing it. After Alexandrine implores Emile to ask for an advance to meet the rent, Emile is questioned by a police officer over his new controversial book, â??The Confessions of Claude,â?• as well as assaulting Emileâ??s critical writings about the current state of French society. The police officer orders Emile to stop writing as his writings have upset the prosecutor. The situation results in Emileâ??s discharge from his employer. Emile thanks his employer for now allowing him to write critically full-time and proclaims to continue his critical writings â??until the stench is strong enough that something will be done about it.â?•

Zola, one of Franceâ??s most significant 19th century writers, enters a period of great literary productivity and comes to a point where he concludes his work is complete. He is well-respected having received a letter of admittance to the French Academy, a legendary council established in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu to protect and purify the French language in all matters pertaining to the French. Without much ado, then with great consternation, Zola risks his own well-being as he sees his Cezanne portrait, and undertakes the cause of Alfred Dreyfus, portrayed by Joseph Schildkraut. Dreyfus is a French Army Captain falsely accused of treason and is serving out a life sentence on Franceâ??s infamous Devilâ??s Island (*Papillon*, 1973). With Zolaâ??s pen what unfolds becomes known as the Dreyfus Affair, an historic, unjust moment in French history, that culminates in a restoration of Franceâ??s shining commitment to truth, liberty and justice.

*The Life of Emile Zola* is an exceptional work that stands the test of time. *Zola is* shot on 35mm black and white film stock, with a runtime of one hour and fifty-seven minutes and has the distinction of being the first Warner Brothers film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture as noted in Mankiewiczâ??s introduction.  In addition, Schildkraut garnered an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor as did the

writing team of Norman Reilly Raine, Heinz Herald, and Geza Herczeg, for Best Screenplay. The film was nominated for ten Oscars, a record at the time, and is still considered one of the greatest biographical, big screen films of all time. Interestingly, the film uses dissolves in editing to show the passing of time. The make up and costuming support the narrative as well. But what really caught my eye was the filmâ??s camera work and its subtle panning and tracking shots. *The Life of Emile Zola* is a highly recommended film.




**Category**

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3. TCM Classic Film Festival
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