

ZOLA'S WOMAN AS UNNATURAL ANIMAL

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
The Department of French and Italian in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2004

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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The purpose of this dissertation is to show how certain female characters in Zola question the received notion about the human-animal border and the related distinction between the male and the female. The novels I examine are *Madeleine Férat*, *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*, *La Curée*, *Nana*, and *Travail*. The renewal of interest in contemporary French philosophy on human-animal relations serves as a framework for a reevaluation of the naturalist author, and my analysis of animal metaphors proposes a refinement of the status of the human in Zola. I show how female characters constantly move between the human and the animal to the point of ending either in an ambiguous human-animal in-between or in a transcendence of such a limit. In order to establish a context for Zola's work, I analyze different aspects of the human-animal discourse in 19<sup>th</sup> century culture, from the legendary theory of impregnation to androgyny and from sexual inversion to the myth of the femme fatale in both literature and in the arts. Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's notion of becoming-animal, which inscribes animal instincts within a positive discourse, is my main critical reference. I also refer to Alain Badiou's ethics of truth, which describes the relation of ethics to subjectivity, in my discussion of the subjective status of humans seen as animals. This dissertation underscores oppositions inherent in the human animal, such as Nature versus society. As the title suggests, I posit an oxymoron in viewing woman as an unnatural animal, as an animal in conflict with its human nature or as a human in conflict with its animal side. The human-animal border is not only more frequently subverted but also more complex in female characters than in their male counterpart in Zola's novels, thus illustrating

that the human-animal status of women characters poses a real problem while its male counterpart is less puzzling. Maybe unwittingly, Zola's women profoundly upset 19<sup>th</sup> century definitions of both humanity and femininity, to a degree that almost contradicts Zola's own avowed positions in this matter.

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## **PREFACE**

I would like to thank all my wonderful professors, both at the University of Zurich and at the University of Pittsburgh, who showed me how exciting and challenging an academic career could be. Thank you to Dr. Yves Citton, Dr. Daniel Russell and Dr. Phil Watts, who have been great sources of inspiration and remarkable mentors. Special thanks and warm gratitude go to my exceptional dissertation director, Dr. Giuseppina Mecchia, for her constant encouragement, for her enthusiasm about my project and for her outstanding intellectual support.

This dissertation would not have been possible without my husband's loving patience for the long and numerous hours I spent with my computer. I also want to thank Jamie for proofreading every single page of this dissertation. This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to animal lovers everywhere.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a survey for *La revue illustrée* in 1892, Emile Zola gave the same one-word answer for the categories “L’animal que je préfère”<sup>1</sup> and “L’oiseau que je préfère:”<sup>2</sup> “Tous.”<sup>3</sup> Zola loved animals and could not prevent himself from incorporating them in his novels and in his conception of the human subject. Besides numerous other animals, Zola himself owned a close relative of man, a female macaque named Rhunka, whom he considers quite human and quite free: “Elle est entièrement libre maintenant, elle court dans le jardin, et, en ce moment même, elle vient frapper à la fenêtre de mon salon, parce qu’il ne fait pas très chaud dehors.”<sup>4</sup> Rhunka seems to be free outside around the house but she needs Zola’s attention to come back inside. Her semi-freedom foreshadows Zola’s equivocal stance toward feminism and toward his animalized female characters. On the one hand, his macaque is anthropomorphized to some extent in having a name and in enjoying freedom, while a reversed situation in which women are animalized occurs in the novels I will examine. This dissertation will discuss the extent of the animalization of these characters as well as the consequence of their animalization on their human status. By focusing on the animal side of a selection of characters, this study proposes a refinement of the status of the human in Zola, in particular of the male and the female. It also discusses the role of animality and of its tension in the definition of man, who is a reasonable being at constant risk of falling into bestiality: “Le franchissement de l’obstacle que représente

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<sup>1</sup> Colette Becker, *Emile Zola entre le doute et rêve de totalité* (Paris: Hachette, 1993) 272.

<sup>2</sup> Becker 272.

<sup>3</sup> Becker 272.

<sup>4</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance: les lettres et les arts* (Paris: Charpentier, 1908) 71.

l'animalité est constitutive de cette définition; une telle tension fait de l'essence de l'homme une contradiction quasiment impossible à résorber."<sup>5</sup>

On various occasions, Zola underlines the animality of the human; for example, at one point, he states that "Il y a un fonds de bête humaine chez tous."<sup>6</sup> Even his definition of naturalism reinforces his concern in the importance of Nature to man: "C'est un retour à l'homme et à la nature, à la nature considérée dans son action, à l'homme considéré dans ses besoins et dans ses instincts."<sup>7</sup> The naturalist project thus implies a search for truth by analyzing physiological man in a certain environment. By being compared to animals, which implies a return to Nature, women such as Nana and Renée may seem to be beasts fulfilling base instincts. Yet I will show how such female characters constantly move between the human and the animal to the point of ending either in an ambiguous human-animal in-between or in a transcendence of such a limit. This dissertation will underscore oppositions inherent in the human animal, such as Nature versus society or instinct versus institution. Its title already suggests an oxymoron in viewing woman as an unnatural animal, as an animal in conflict with its human nature or as a human in conflict with its animal side. However my analysis concentrates on the limit between the human and the animal, a border which is often blurred in novels but which is clearer in scientific and philosophical discourse. In the novels I examine, a striking majority of animal metaphors are attributed to female characters. Almost all of them are associated with Madeleine in *Madeleine Férat*. Twenty-three are used to describe Désirée and Albine while only five to depict Serge in *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*. Renée has twice as many metaphors as Aristide in *La*

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<sup>5</sup> Florence Burgat, *Animal, mon prochain* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997) 74.

<sup>6</sup> Emile Zola, *Le roman expérimental* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971) 152.

<sup>7</sup> Zola, *Roman expérimental* 350.

*curée*, and Nana also counts twice as many animal comparisons as the other male characters combined. The human-animal border is not only more frequently subverted but also more problematic in female characters than in their male counterparts in Zola's novels, thus illustrating that the human-animal status of women characters poses a real problem while its male counterpart is less puzzling.

### **1.1. Contemporary Philosophical Discourse on the Human/Animal**

There is a renewal of interest in contemporary French philosophy on human-animal relations, which serves as a framework for a reevaluation of Zola and his animal imagery. For instance, Elisabeth de Fontenay<sup>8</sup> reconsiders the frontier between humanity and animality in her lengthy reflection entitled *Le silence des bêtes*. She gives her opinion on topics related to animals in numerous thinkers, from Aristotle to Claude Bernard and from Descartes to Michelet. She considers human and animal causes as one, thus opposing a radical separation between humans and animals, and she even proposes an analogy between mistreated humans and animals. She is in favor of animal rights, similar to human rights, to defend suffering animals who cannot express themselves. For instance, she condemns Claude Bernard's arguments in favor of vivisection. She considers animals only as suffering beings deserving human pity, thus failing to recognize the violent nature of certain animals in natural settings where they exert sufferings upon others as a consequence of the struggle for existence. I think that her approach is utopian to some extent, and I will show another approach to the feeling of pity in the second chapter. I will present Zola's personal thoughts on animals, which will reveal how the naturalist author goes

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<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Le silence des bêtes: la philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

beyond pure feelings of pity. Alain Badiou's notions of ethics of human and animal rights will also bring another dimension to pity. Moreover, this study tries to demarcate the human and animal sides of a selection of female characters and does not propose a merging of humanity and animality into a common purpose as de Fontenay suggests.

Florence Burgat<sup>9</sup> explores the discourse on the difference between the human and the animal in relation to five specific topics: natural law, definition of man as a reasonable animal, epistemological problems caused by animals, anthropological aspects of the human's animality and the ethical question posed by pity. Her book is provocative to a certain extent in showing how the philosophical tradition presented animals in such a way as to make them disappear under human supremacy. For Burgat, the animal is described through a series of negations and in opposition to the human, as lacking soul, reason, freedom and conscience. It is for these reasons that the animal is reified and that man is "un *autre* en élaborant précisément cette altérité par opposition à l'animalité, qui en devient par définition le référent négatif, le contre-modèle."<sup>10</sup> Burgat puts into question the validity of the criteria separating men from animals by giving examples of problematic beings, like the mentally challenged who lacks reason and who is human but who cannot be included under the definition of man as a reasonable animal. Another definition impasse occurs with the sense of sociability and of moral sense which Darwin notices in animals, although these nonhuman beings are excluded from man's morals. In this dissertation, I will give various reactions to the discourse on human-animal difference. The introduction to the scientific discourse on homosexuality and to the theory of impregnation presents another aspect of the human-animal limit in showing how the animal serves as a

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<sup>9</sup> Florence Burgat, *Animal, mon prochain* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Burgat 16.

reference to explain human phenomena. Moreover, in an effort to delimit the human-animal border in Zola's novels, I will underscore how that border is often indistinct and how it brings a further component to the enigma surrounding female characters. Finally, in his utopian society of *Travail*, I will present Zola's proposal for reducing the animal side of the human.

Armelle Le Bras-Chopard received the *prix Médicis* in 2000 for her essay *Le zoo des philosophes*,<sup>11</sup> in which she shows how man's supremacy over animals legitimates other types of discriminations. She starts by defining animals as non-human beings because they lack crucial human elements such as erect posture, faces and political status. She uses the zoo as a metaphor to designate "ce lieu réel ou symbolique où des individus ont été introduits contre leur gré, au nom d'une définition arbitraire. Violence, capture et perte définitive de la liberté sont les étapes de ce processus de domination."<sup>12</sup> The nonhuman and human beings she includes in her zoo and she discusses are domesticated animals, savage beasts, monsters, women, and so-called "Barbarians." While Le Bras-Chopard proposes a historical perspective of woman's status as a dominated being across the centuries, I will show the complex human-animal status of a selection of female characters, who are rather more domineering than dominated in Zola's "zoo."

Dominique Lestel discusses animality as a way to propose a definition of the human and discovers a reciprocal relation between the human and the animal: "De même qu'une définition de l'humain qui ignorerait totalement l'animal serait paradoxalement incomplète, une caractérisation de l'animalité indépendamment de l'homme semble difficilement pensable."<sup>13</sup> He

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<sup>11</sup> Armelle Le Bras-Chopard, *Le zoo des philosophes: de la bestialisation à l'exclusion* (Paris: Plon, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Le Bras-Chopard 22.

<sup>13</sup> Dominique Lestel, *L'animalité: essai sur le statut de l'humain* (Paris: Hatier, 1996) 58-59.

bases his essay on three hypotheses: the animal always represents a strange figure of alterity for men; the identity of man occurs by its relation to the animal and modern techniques have transformed the question of animality. Instead of opposing men to animals, Lestel offers an approach which joins humans and animals. For instance, the creation of hybrid communities, where animals, such as domesticated animals or tamed savage animals, and humans share the same living space, puts into question the human-animal limit as well as the type of contract pertaining to them. Zola announces this type of hybrid communities in his utopian vision of society where communication occurs between humans and animals. For instance, in the tale entitled “Aventure du grand Sidoine et du petit Médéric” which is included in his *Contes à Ninon*, the main character Primevère understands animal language and tries to eradicate the differences of species between animals to make them closer to humans. Furthermore, Lestel sees Georges Bataille as a French writer who has intensely studied the frontier between the human and the animal. For instance, Bataille discusses art as a criterion of distinction between the human and the animal. Prehistoric art discovered in caves marks the passage from animal to man by showing the life of the first men. It is interesting that these first men depicted themselves as animals, which is a crucial element of their evolution: “Nous devons nous dire que le pas décisif eut lieu quand l’homme, qui se voyait devenu tel, loin d’avoir honte, comme nous, de la part animale qui restait en lui, déguisa au contraire cette humanité qui le distinguait des bêtes.”<sup>14</sup> Thus animality has a positive connotation for prehistoric men. In the nineteenth century and even today, there is a reversal in these perceptions since the animal side of the human is usually seen

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<sup>14</sup> Georges Bataille, “Le passage de l’animal à l’homme et la naissance de l’art,” *Oeuvres complètes*, vol.12 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) 263.

as a negative element. Nevertheless, this study will underline positive connotations in some of Zola's animal metaphors.

Giorgio Agamben bases his biopolitical and juridico-institutional approach on two Greek terms for 'life,' *zoe* which relates to the fact of living common to men and animals and *bios* which relates to a way of living in society. Agamben claims that "the entry of *zoe* into the sphere of the *polis*—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought."<sup>15</sup> He uses *homo sacer*, who can be killed but not sacrificed, as the protagonist of his essay to show how the realm of bare life coincides with the political realm and how these two realms become indistinguishable. Agamben views the production of bare life, life exposed to death or pure Being, as the originary political element and as a threshold of articulation between nature and culture. The production of bare life is also the fundamental activity of sovereign power. Agamben thus sees the absorption of *zoe* or bare life by modern politics as a negative event. The Nazi death camp is not then a political aberration but a threshold in which human beings are reduced to bare life. As in Agamben's biopolitical approach, Zola views animality as an obstacle to politics in the human as I will discuss in the second chapter. At various occasions, Zola stresses the fact that human progress will only occur when the human reduces his animal side and that the human can only acquire human status by controlling his animal side. For Zola, politics and animality are crucial for articulating human subjectivity, and my discussion of Zola's active role in the Dreyfus affair will underscore that political subjectivity and humanity are

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<sup>15</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 4.

tightly linked. In the last chapter, I will analyze the political subjectivity of Etienne Lantier and Luc Froment, two characters who try to solve the riddle of the human as animal.

In an interview entitled “Violences contre les animaux” with Elisabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Derrida, on the topic of the attribution of human rights to animals, claims that the question of animality is enigmatic because “il n’y a pas une seule frontière, une et indivisible, entre l’Homme et l’Animal.”<sup>16</sup> He further explores this human-animal border in a recent article, in which he gives three crucial points regarding the description of the human-animal limit: “This abyssal rupture doesn’t describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges, Man and Animal in general;”<sup>17</sup> “The multiple and heterogeneous border of this abyssal rupture has a history”<sup>18</sup> and “Beyond the edge of the so-called human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, [...] there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely [...] a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death.”<sup>19</sup> Because of the aforementioned reasons, the frontier between the human and the animal is indescribable. The term *animal* is inappropriate for this philosophical discussion: “to speak blithely of the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest, and most symptomatic idiocies [*bêtises*] of

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain... Dialogue* (Paris: Fayard-Galilée, 2001) 111.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 399.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida 399.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida 399.



those who call themselves humans.”<sup>20</sup> Derrida thus coins a new word *l’animot*, a portmanteau neologism combining *animal* and *mot* and pronounced the same way as *animaux*, thus “indicating clearly thereby that it is indeed a matter of a word, only a word.”<sup>21</sup> This new term allows Derrida to “bring together three heterogeneous elements within a single verbal body.”<sup>22</sup> First of all, *animot* is a way to “have the plural of animals heard in the singular. There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.”<sup>23</sup> The suffix *mot* serves to underline the concept of the word and of nominal language, which really separates man from animal. Derrida hopes that this coined word will bring a new way of thinking about the animal that does not see the absence of the word as a privation. Finally, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce an innovative concept, that of becoming-animal, in their philosophical system which also puts into question the limit between the human and the animal.

## **1.2. Deleuze and Guattari’s Becoming-Animal and -Woman in Zola**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce a new type of analysis called schizoanalysis, a materialist approach of the unconscious, in response to psychoanalysis. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they present important notions for understanding the concept of becoming. The most important relates

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<sup>20</sup> Derrida 409.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida 409.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida 415.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida 415.

to desire and its object as one and the same thing: the subject is now on a molecular level, where it has escaped the molar<sup>24</sup> dichotomy of the subject and the object. In Deleuze and Guattari's world, everything and everyone are desiring-machines, which are always double or binary in the sense that a desiring-machine is always connected to another machine. The desiring-machines, which have positive intensities, are attached onto the body without organs, which has a zero intensity. Libido is the energy used to make desiring-machines function, and desire is no longer linked to lack but to production. The schizoanalyst is a mechanic: he decodes flows of discourse and desire and deconstructs desiring-machines in the unconscious, which is productive and divided into a molar and a molecular part. The unconscious is also compared to a rhizome, a centreless structure engendering multiplicities and lines of flight. There is no death instinct: a continual process of breaking down is the working mode of the desiring-machines. Deleuze and Guattari do not define a body by its form, its function or its organs. They move beyond the notions of gender and of sexual relations. Instead of the two molar sexes, they propose a multiplicity of molecular sexuality. Deleuze and Guattari define the human body using the Spinozist notion of affects which are intensities influencing the individual's power to act: becoming is equivalent to such an affect.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari present the concept of becoming, which appears between social and desire production. Becoming does not establish corresponding relations and becoming is neither a progression nor a regression along a series. Becoming is equivalent to an evolution between heterogeneous beings, which Deleuze and Guattari designate with the term involution. Becoming-something is typically behavioral: it is a freeing of molecular functioning, but becoming is not an imitation or identification with something.

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<sup>24</sup> This term refers to a type of categorization based on dichotomies.

Becoming occurs as the result of a contact between one's own particles closest to what one is becoming and between the particles associated with the becoming. Becoming-man is majoritarian as the model imposed everywhere and is a molar entity; the other becomings are minoritarian at the molecular level of the unconscious, while becoming-woman is the starting point of this chain of becomings and becoming-imperceptible the immanent end of becomings. Becoming occurs through a line of flight which is always in the middle; this line of becoming does not connect points but it passes between them. The specific passage of a line of flight cannot be predicted. Becoming does not produce anything except itself.

The human being's becoming-animal is real but the animal he becomes is not. Becoming-animal relates to a multiplicity, to a pack or band of animals. Within this multiplicity there is an exceptional being with which one makes an alliance. The anomalous does not correspond to an individual or a species, it is a phenomenon of bordering where the anomalous is in a peripheral position and demarcates itself from the other members of the pack. Becoming is rather a reciprocal capturing between the animal and the human: "l'animal capturé par l'homme se trouve déterritorialisé par la force humaine, tout le début du Rapport insiste sur ce point. Mais à son tour la force animale déterritorialisée précipite et rend plus intense la déterritorialisation de la force humaine déterritorialisante."<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari view the deployment of basic instincts positively and as a liberating force: animal flows of desire, which reveal an instinctive satisfaction of sexual needs, appear as lines of flight which are reterritorialized on similar animal molecules and form a becoming.

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<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1975) 25.

For Deleuze, writing and becoming are always connected: in writing, one becomes something other than a writer. The question is then whether Zola endures such a transformational process while writing, whether he becomes-woman and –animal by composing his novels. I think that his depiction of Désirée, who fully becomes-animal, makes him also become-animal since he creates desire as animal lines of flight. In Nana’s and Renée’s cases, becoming-animal refers to one part of these characters’ multiple personality, but it is clear that these becomings have a liberating effect upon the characters, the text and the naturalist author. Nevertheless Zola becomes even more animal through his constant use of animal imagery, since “c’est par un style qu’on devient animal.”<sup>26</sup> There also occurs a becoming-animal of his language. This dissertation will reveal the extent of animal references in Zola’s novels and thoughts and will explain how Zola attains a zone of indiscernibility where he can no longer be distinguished from the animal. Zola also clearly links animality and femininity in making his cat François become-woman. Moreover, Zola enters the proximity of female molecules through his creation of literary female figures. By depicting female characters whose personality is made of multiple layers, Zola appears himself at the starting point of the chain of becomings: he becomes-woman. His conception of androgynous beings like Renée and Thérèse implies a multiple molecular sexuality; the Goncourt brothers in their journal of December 1878 describe Zola as an androgynous being, as a male author becoming-woman:

Nous avons eu, aujourd’hui, à déjeuner notre admirateur Zola; c’était la première fois que nous nous rencontrions. Notre impression toute première fut de voir en lui un Normalien légèrement crevard, mais, en le regardant bien, le râblé jeune homme nous apparut avec des délicatesses, des modelages de fine porcelaine dans

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<sup>26</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 15.

les traits de la figure; en un mot, un peu taillé dans toute sa personne à la façon des vivants de ses livres, de ces êtres complexes, un peu femme parfois dans leur masculinité.<sup>27</sup>

According to this portrait, the naturalist author himself seems to have a split personality, part female, part male. It is thus not surprising that he projects his own multiplicity onto his female characters.

### **1.3. Literature Review: Zola's Women in Relation to the Human/Animal**

W.H.Wardman<sup>28</sup> discusses the relationship between man and animal in French literature, in particular in Montaigne, Descartes, La Fontaine, Diderot, Balzac and Zola. Wardman shows that the machine is man's oppressor both in *Germinal's* mine and in *La bête humaine's* locomotive, while Nature transforms *La terre's* peasants into lustful beasts. Wardman discovers a feeling of compassion in Zola's approach of the human as animal. We will see in the second chapter that the naturalist author goes beyond such a sentiment of pity. In his interpretation of *Germinal*, Jean-Pierre Davoine goes to another extreme by viewing animal metaphors as epic elements rather than as a degrading vision of humanity. The repetition of the term *rut* is then pantheistic since Zola refers to Nature's fecundating ability:

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Berta, *De l'androgynie dans les Rougon-Macquart et deux autres études sur Zola*, Romance Languages and Literature Vol.22 (New York: Peter Lang, 1985) 54-55.

<sup>28</sup> W.H. Wardman, "Thought and Literature in France: Montaigne to Zola; Man and the Animal World," *Universitas* 6.1 (1977): 56-67.

Quant à « rut », mot ennobli par sa fréquence dans le langage de la vénerie, certains passages permettent de bien voir son effet naturel: bien qu'exprimant la domination de forces naturelles, il ne rabaisse pas les mineurs au rang de bêtes, mais tout au contraire leur communique une impulsion surhumaine qui participe au grandissement épique. Aucun autre mot ne peut le remplacer, car il ramène le désir à un niveau humain, avec sa dimension sociale. Tandis que « rut » appliqué aux hommes leur confère une force aussi invincible que celles de la nature et faisant éclater les bornes traditionnelles imposées par la société.<sup>29</sup>

For Davoine, comparisons of humans to animals are always positive except when miners are domesticated animals. Philip Walker<sup>30</sup> studies the image of the snake in *Germinal*, and notices that it is often associated with the evil and even infernal aspect of the mine. This metaphor is also frequently used to describe women not only in *Germinal* but also in *La curée* and *Nana*, two novels I will discuss. Peter Conroy divides animal imagery in Zola's *Nana* into three categories. First of all, there are "neutral uses of animal imagery"<sup>31</sup> which stem from idiomatic comparisons. Some others are comic, but the main animal metaphors originate from mythical imagery which "transform Nana metaphorically into a beast that exercises an animal magnetism, an animal

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<sup>29</sup> Jean-Pierre Davoine, "Métaphores animales dans «Germinal,»" *Etudes françaises* 4 (1968): 391.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Walker, "De l'image du serpent dans *Germinal*," *Les critiques de notre temps et Zola*, ed. Colette Becker (Paris: Garnier, 1972) 128-29.

<sup>31</sup> Peter V. Conroy, Jr., "The Metaphorical Web in Zola's *Nana*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 47.3 (1978): 241.

attraction over men.”<sup>32</sup> As we will see in the chapter devoted to Nana, it is the last type of animal metaphors that make her a mythic and enigmatic literary figure.

Philippe Bonnefis, in his article on Zola’s bestiary, offers a numerical account of animal images in the naturalist author’s novels. They appear in every novel written by Zola, culminating with 340 instances in *L’assommoir*. Bonnefis classifies animal metaphors into three types revealing “un équilibre, [...] un manque ou [...] un excès.”<sup>33</sup> For instance, the human beast is a traditional image used to depict an excess of brutality and of sexuality. The human as animal thus expresses either fascination or repulsion in Zola’s novels. Bonnefis claims that “théoriquement, l’image animale est, deux fois sur trois au moins, affectée d’un signe négatif,”<sup>34</sup> as a depreciative and dehumanizing image in relation to natural harmony. As we will see in the last chapter of this dissertation, Zola finds a remedy to his bestialisation in depicting a liberating humanization in his *Evangiles*, “s’efforçant de tirer tout le parti possible des forces vitales élémentaires, mais pour faire l’homme, au lieu de le défaire: le rut devient une mission – celle de perpétuer la vie, le travail n’est plus un labeur brutal et vain, l’enseignement aide l’humanité à sortir des limbes primitives.”<sup>35</sup>

Naomi Schor<sup>36</sup> reviews Jean Borie’s study on Zolian women, *Le tyran timide: le naturalisme de la femme au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*.<sup>37</sup> Borie analyzes women’s roles in Zola’s novels from a

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<sup>32</sup> Conroy 241.

<sup>33</sup> Philippe Bonnefis, “Le bestiaire d’Emile Zola: valeur et signification des images animales dans son oeuvre romanesque,” *Europe* 46 (1968): 98.

<sup>34</sup> Bonnefis 100.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnefis 105.

<sup>36</sup> in “Mother’s Day: Zola’s Women,” *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. David Baguley (Boston: Hall, 1986) 130-42.

Marxist point of view and then offers a Freudian interpretation of *La joie de vivre*. Schor deplors his excessive use of the Oedipus complex and of Freudian generalizations. In *Zola et les mythes*,<sup>38</sup> Borie psychoanalyzes Zola's main novels, in the light of neurosis and castration. He shows that sexuality always implies destruction, that original sin is fatal and that man cannot escape his animal side. For instance, he claims that Nana's personality "est sans mystère aucun, sans grand charme, et sans prestige, le comble du banal, de l'ordinaire, de l'explicable;"<sup>39</sup> he is only interested in her mysterious sexual organ. In this dissertation, I intend to transcend the negative implications of a psychoanalytical approach to Zola's women and to go beyond the belief that man's animal drives are purely negative.

In her study of Zola's women, Anna Krakowski<sup>40</sup> proposes an introduction to Zola's views of women, which is followed by a classification of female characters into types, such as *la mondaine*, *la demi-mondaine*, *la bourgeoise*, and *la femme du peuple*. She claims that Zola is one of the few writers who took the emancipation of women and the equality between the sexes seriously. For instance, she suggests that Zola only values two roles in a female character, that of mother and of wife; she claims that the ideal woman is Zola's remedy to its evil and threatening counterpart. Schor notes that Krakowski's "constant preoccupation is to abstract and delineate Zola's *ideal* woman,"<sup>41</sup> and she does so by categorizing his characters in negative and positive

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<sup>37</sup> Jean Borie, *Le tyran timide: le naturalisme de la femme au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Jean Borie, *Zola et les mythes ou de la nausée au salut* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

<sup>39</sup> Borie, *Zola et les mythes* 49.

<sup>40</sup> Anna Krakowski, *La condition de la femme dans l'oeuvre d'Emile Zola* (Paris: Nizet, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> Schor, *Mother's day* 134.



types which leads her to claim that Zola shows vice to teach virtue. Nevertheless I will show that Zola was fascinated by unusual characters such as androgynous beings and that his stance toward women is complex and cannot be reduced to such generalities.<sup>42</sup> I agree with Schor who criticizes Krakowski's reductionist view of *Nana*, which she considers "un vrai plaidoyer contre le mal de l'époque:"<sup>43</sup> "Krakowski is so bent on proving that Zola repudiated the Romantics' glorification of the courtesan and sexual passion that she completely overlooks Nana's mythic quality, her demonic dimension."<sup>44</sup> Schor concludes that it is necessary to recognize "the split within Zola's female characters"<sup>45</sup> rather than the polarization of woman as angel versus woman as demon proposed by Krakowski. I will go beyond such dichotomies choosing rather to underscore the unresolved mystery inherent in these characters. As Schor suggests, I will explore the tension appearing within Zola's female characters, especially in *Nana* and in *Renée*.

Chantal Jennings, in two articles entitled "Zola féministe?,"<sup>46</sup> offers an excellent introduction not only to Zola's articles on feminist issues but also to the female characters depicted in his novels. Zola wrote numerous articles on the feminine condition, ranging from education issues to the wearing of short skirts. Jennings notes that Zola's arguments in his articles on women are not one-sided. Indeed I will underline the intricacies of Zola's stance toward women. Jules Michelet's theories of pure love are at the basis of his conception. The

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<sup>42</sup> As an illustration, Krakowski claims that "Son [de Zola] attitude vis-à-vis de la femme n'est pas équivoque" (232).

<sup>43</sup> Krakowski 197.

<sup>44</sup> Schor, *Mother's day* 135.

<sup>45</sup> Schor, *Mother's day* 141.

<sup>46</sup> Chantal Jennings, "Zola féministe? I," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 44 (1972): 172-87, and "Zola féministe? II," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 45 (1973): 1-22.

furthest claim Zola makes in relation to feminism leads him to claim that men and women are equal in Nature but not in society. The naturalist author seems to remain traditionalist as Jennings proposes:

[A]u niveau de la conscience Zola prend le plus souvent parti pour un féminisme modéré, défendant les intérêts de la femme à l'intérieur du foyer, critiquant les conditions de son travail et préconisant certaines réformes de la législation civile ou sociale. Pourtant sa méfiance vis-à-vis du divorce, ses longues hésitations et ses réserves sur le chapitre de l'éducation des filles, son insistance lancinante sur la corruption du milieu où vivent les femmes du peuple plutôt que sur leur misère, semblent annoncer un traditionalisme foncier.<sup>47</sup>

We will see that indeed Zola depicts women according to men's needs. Furthermore, Chantal Bertrand-Jennings offers an interesting discussion of Zola's women in *L'éros et la femme chez Zola*. She divides her analysis into four main parts: "féminité maléfique," "nouvelle éthique," "le moi triomphant" and "une vision catastrophique et infernale de la sexualité."<sup>48</sup> In *Thérèse Raquin* or *La terre*, guilty women expiate their mistakes through death or remorse. In these cases, women also represent a trap set by Nature, which lowers man's status to animal. She continues to cite examples of malefic femininity, from hysteric women to prostitutes to femmes fatales, and to males responding to these women as either conquerors or victims. The solution to the dangerous forces emanating from such women is not male domination but rather woman's liberation from

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<sup>47</sup> Jennings, *Zola féministe? II* 20.

<sup>48</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L'éros et la femme chez Zola: de la chute au paradis retrouvé* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 11.

religion, which Zola explores in *Vérité*, one of his last novels. According to Bertrand-Jennings, this liberation from religious precepts and from the cult of the Virgin is the first step toward women's liberation. Yet Zola also condemns male chastity caused by religion in his depiction of the priest Serge Mouret, who loses the fight between his animal desire and his religious precepts. For Zola's women, Bertrand-Jennings suggests that maternity is the panacea which serves to eradicate the original sin often associated to female sexuality. It is in his last novels that Zola introduces the character of the redeemer as we will see in the figure of Luc in *Travail*, where the ideal woman is a maternal figure who supports her husband: "A la limite, la double menace de l'Autre et du sexe se trouve abolie par la disparition de la femme et la glorification du Moi."<sup>49</sup> I agree with Bertrand-Jennings that maternity gains in importance in Zola's last works. Yet I think that the main shortcoming of her approach is that she ignores the positive side and the enigmatic nature of Zola's women. For instance, for her, Nana is a purely dangerous and malefic character who represents an "abominable pourriture morale."<sup>50</sup> She totally dismisses Nana's puzzling human-animal status as well as her mythical dimension. Another limitation in Bertrand-Jennings' discourse is her constant referral to the myth of the Other and to her classification of Zola's men and women as either oppressors or oppressed. In this dissertation, instead of following Bertrand-Jennings' path in considering woman as a threatening force to men, I try to go beyond such categorization in underscoring the bewildering aspect of a selection of Zola's women emerging from their human-animal status.

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<sup>49</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 126.

<sup>50</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 61.

My discourse inscribes itself in Schor's<sup>51</sup> approach which views femininity, and therefore also humanity, as an enigma in Zola's novels. This aspect of Zola's woman appears in the sphinxes to which both Renée and Nana are compared. The sphinx has two meanings: it is a mythical monster with a lion body but a human head guarding Egyptian tombs but it is also an enigmatic person in a literary context. Both these definitions can relate to Zola's Nana and Renée since these female characters are uncanny and since their being is made of an inherent human-animal association. The figure of the sphinx serves to underscore the enigmatic movement between the human and the animal as well as the problematic status resulting from such oscillations. In his short story entitled "Les chattes," Zola depicts his two female cats, Françoise and Catherine. While the former is humanized as a Parisian woman, the latter is deified as a divinity and as a sphinx. Like Zola's female characters in his novels, Catherine the cat and the sphinx is an enigmatic being who is both human and animal. Zola's own pets are humanized but a reversal occurs in his novels in which his human characters are animalized. The metaphor of the sphinx implies a combination of two opposed terms as a monster with both human and animal parts, which can be related to Zola's woman as an unnatural animal. Indeed Zola depicts his female characters as having two irreconcilable sides such as an animal who does not live according to natural laws. For instance, Renée becomes-animal in her sexual relations with her stepson Maxime, and in spite of their frequent relations, she does not get pregnant. Were she a true animal, she would function according to periods of heat and she would eventually conceive. There is also another contradictory dimension to the sphinx: it is a monster, who can be considered both a negative and positive being, as either abnormal or extraordinary. This occurs

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<sup>51</sup> Naomi Schor, "Le sourire du sphinx: Zola et l'énigme de la féminité," *Romantisme* 13-14 (1976): 183-95.

in the comparison of Renée to the monster in *La curée*, and I will show that this contradictory definition serves to underline one facet of her multiple personality. Finally, this use of the term ‘sphinx’ by Zola and the approach of woman as unnatural animal highlight the conflict between the human and the animal sides of these female characters. These contradictions announce a difficult resolution of this blurring of the human-animal frontier.

In chapter one, *Zola and the Scientific: Influences, the Legendary Theory of Impregnation and Feminism*, I start by introducing the scientific sources at the origin of Zola’s conception of the human as animal. I study one scientific influence in detail, the mythical theory of impregnation, which views women in physiological terms and the first lover as a major influence on the conceived child. The analysis of this myth in one of Zola’s early novels, *Madeleine Férat*, focuses on animal metaphors associated with the sinful woman. This scientific legend then leads to a final discussion of Zola’s stance toward feminism. In chapter two, *Albine, Désirée, Emile and Badiou’s Ethics of Human and Animal Rights*, I describe the predominance of animals in Zola’s life, which he expresses under the form of two feelings, love and pity. I then question these two feelings, which appear not only in Zola’s personal thoughts but also in *La faute de l’abbé Mouret*, and in his active role in the Dreyfus affair, in the light of Alain Badiou’s ethics of human and animal rights. I also wonder whether Zola’s depiction of Albine’s and Désirée’s animal metamorphoses can be seen as Deleuzian becoming-animal. In chapter three, *Renée as Androgynous Human Animal in La Curée*, I explore the relation between androgyny and animality in Renée and show how the notion of becoming is useful to explain her ambiguous character and her incessant transformations. I also analyze the androgyny of characters such as Maxime, Catherine and Théophile. I end by demonstrating how Renée and Maxime acquire

human subjectivity in spite of their monstrosity. In chapter four, *Zola and Medical-Literary Discourse on Homosexuality*, after introducing the human-animal aspect of scientific studies on homosexuality in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, I discuss two prefaces Zola wrote, one for a medical study on homosexuality and the other for a popular novel on lesbianism. I also pay attention to a selection of gay characters in *La curée* and in *Nana*, and I show an interesting contrast between medical and literary discourse on homosexuality. In chapter five, *Nana's Enigmatic Human-Animal Status as Femme Fatale*, I present the myth of the femme fatale in 19<sup>th</sup> century France and I relate Nana to this conception. Numerous animal metaphors give Nana a mythic resonance in making her bigger than Nature and in rendering her a complex character whose human-animal status is not clear by the end of the novel. In chapter six, *Toward a Utopian New Society: Lantier's and Froment's Battle against the Human Animal*, I articulate the evolution of Zola's discourse on the human animal by studying Etienne Lantier's efforts against the conception of the miner as animal and Luc Froment's combat for a new and better society in *Travail*. Zola purifies his inclination to human-animal metaphors in one of his last novels, *Travail*, in which he reevaluates and proposes a remedy to his conception of the human as animal. I also illustrate how political subjectivity plays a major role in this evolution.

## 2. Zola and the Scientific: Influences, the Legendary Theory of Impregnation and Feminism

### 2.1. Contemporary Influences on Zola's Conception of the Human as Animal

The conception of the human as animal is one of Zola's most prevalent concerns in his works. It clearly lowers man, since it is like "l'ébauche de l'homme, toute cette animalité fraternelle [...]"<sup>1</sup> In *Le roman expérimental*, Zola claims that "Il y a un fonds de bête humaine chez tous, comme il y a un fonds de maladie."<sup>2</sup> It is in the same work that Zola integrates Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*. Naturalism thus becomes a "cognitive practice that stipulates at once an object of knowledge (the elementary functions of the body as flesh), a set of rules for elaborating knowledge (the rigid demarcation between hypothesis and observation, narration and description), and a knowing subject (the experimentalist)."<sup>3</sup> Hippolyte Taine, on whom Zola wrote an article, makes numerous analogies between natural and human history in his preface to *Essais de critique et d'histoire*. He also popularized Charles Darwin's principles, especially the notion of *milieu*, and he underlines the link between the human and the animal in this famous quote: "l'animal humain continue l'animal brut."<sup>4</sup> For Taine, heredity reveals innate instincts and urges that man cannot control. He states: "transformer l'homme en machine, [...] l'assujettir à quelques rouages intérieurs, [...] l'asservir aux grandes pressions environnantes, [...] nier la personne indépendante et libre, [...] décourager nos efforts, en nous

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Zola, *Le docteur Pascal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) 180.

<sup>2</sup> Emile Zola, *Le roman expérimental* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971) 152.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 129.

<sup>4</sup> Hippolyte Taine, *Essais de critique et d'histoire* (Paris: Hachette, 1923) xxvii.

apprenant que nous sommes contraints et conduits au dehors et au dedans par des forces que nous n'avons pas faites et que nous devons subir.”<sup>5</sup>

In *Essay on the Principle of Population* of 1798, the English economist and sociologist Thomas Malthus introduced an important problem for social progress, namely that human population increases more quickly than food can be produced. He believed that a controlled relation between population and food increases is a main condition for happiness in the lower classes. If the means of subsistence are insufficient, misery and debauchery will be the consequences. In *Fécondité*, the first volume of Zola's *Quatre évangiles* published in 1899, the narrator praises fecundity as a triumphant and victorious force. This novel is “une oeuvre de propagande nataliste:”<sup>6</sup> Zola was one of the first members of *l'Alliance nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population française*. Mathieu Froment and his wife Marianne embody the large, healthy and happy family: they have twelve children of their own, which leads to a total descent of 158 in four generations. Zola strongly contrasts this powerful fecundity of the lower classes with different forms of destructive malthusianism appearing in the upper classes. In *Fécondité*, several strategies are employed to avoid unwanted procreation: female castration, abortion, infanticide and pensioning off babies to wet nurses. Men of the upper classes do not look for fecundation any longer but for ways to satisfy their sexual desires without risk: they are unfaithful to their wives. This common practice leads to a disappointed Nature which causes a degradation of society: Boutan, the doctor, wishes that men had the wisdom of animals, that they had seasons of heat. Some characters embodying bourgeois values are partisans of the English sociologist and economist: “Malthus était leur homme, [...] uniquement parce que son hypothèse,

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<sup>5</sup> Taine xxii.

<sup>6</sup> David Baguley, “Du récit polémique au discours utopique: l'Évangile républicain de Zola,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 54 (1980): 110.



en rendant les pauvres seuls responsables de leur pauvreté, soulageait les riches du poids importun des remords.”<sup>7</sup> By refuting Malthus’ system in *Fécondité*, Zola shows that children conceived in love constitute a positive force increasing human capital and leading to happiness and justice through work.

Before writing his Rougon-Macquart series, Zola also read *The Origin of Species*, which was translated into French in 1862 and prefaced by Claude Bernard. Darwin’s book, a “crucial landmark of nineteenth-century science and thought,”<sup>8</sup> made a great impression on Zola according to his daughter.<sup>9</sup> In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin, the founder of naturalism in biology, shows that new species are achieved by natural selection and argues for a material, and no longer divine, origin of species. He also implies that humans are first cousins to the apes and that they are thus not the only rational creatures. It is from Malthus that Darwin acquires the basis for his theory of natural selection and the notion of struggle for existence. In fact, in Zola’s novels, the Darwinian struggle for existence is often mirrored in class struggle.

In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin presents the basis of animal behavior and social organization and discovers that many characteristics of animals have evolved not by the influence of their physical and biological environment but by the importance of having the advantage in sexual competitions. In his pages on sexual selection in relation to man, Darwin notes an inequality between the sexes, from a difference in brain size to a masculine preeminence in intellectual powers. Zola, also, does not view man and woman as equal: even in his utopian novel *Travail*, the apparent reconciliation between the sexes is

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<sup>7</sup> Emile Zola, *Fécondité* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1957) 51.

<sup>8</sup> Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1971) 16.

<sup>9</sup> Denise Le Blond-Zola, *Emile Zola raconté par sa fille* (Paris: Grasset, 2000) 58.

illusory. Yet Zola's explanation for women's inferiority is social: he does not give a biological explanation and does not claim that women have reduced abilities. Moreover, Darwin presents conscience, language and reflection as the principal points of divergence between men and animals. Mental and intellectual powers are higher in man than in animals, but it should be stressed that mental powers are capable of improvement in higher animals. It is also interesting to note that Darwin quotes Prosper Lucas as the best authority on physiology and heredity. It must be said that the theories of evolution and of natural selection were controversial in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of their irreligiousness. Zola actually incarnates this conflict between science and religion in *Le docteur Pascal*.

Zola views Lucas' *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle* as a remarkable work which he consults to establish the Rougon-Macquart genealogical tree. In an 1894 letter to Lucien Cuénot, the French biologist who demonstrates that Mendel's laws of heredity are applicable to the animal world, Zola writes: "C'est en 1868 que j'ai bâti tout le plan de mes *Rougon-Macquart*, en m'appuyant sur l'ouvrage du docteur Lucas: *L'Hérédité naturelle*. J'ai tiré de cet ouvrage toute la charpente scientifique de mon œuvre."<sup>10</sup> Lucas believes that heredity functions in the same manner in men and animals; his analysis includes the role of heredity in sickness, in the transmission of moral and physical characteristics as well as in the specific relation between procreation and progeny. In short, heredity is divided into two types, "l'innéité" functioning according to the principle of invention and "l'hérédité" according to the principle of imitation. According to Yves Malinas,<sup>11</sup> Lucas' study is unreadable and lacks

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<sup>10</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 8 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 112.

<sup>11</sup> Yves Malinas, *Zola et les hérédités imaginaires* (Paris: Expansion scientifique française, 1985).

explanations and satisfactory examples. It is indeed very long, sometimes obscure and contradictory. In *Le docteur Pascal*, the concluding novel of the Rougon-Macquart series, Pascal Rougon embodies the optimistic scientist who comments on heredity in the Rougon-Macquart family.

In his correspondence, Zola also acknowledges Charles Letourneau and his *Physiologie des passions* published in 1868 as one of his main theoretical references. Letourneau, a follower of Darwin's notion of evolution who views science as a supreme goddess, presents different types of needs on which man is dependent. Some of these needs move man back to his animal roots and overshadow his higher qualities: "Les plus nobles facultés de l'homme, celles qui font à la fois son orgueil et sa puissance, celles qui le sacrent roi de la nature vivante, sont humblement soumises à ces besoins grossiers qui nous assimilent à la brute."<sup>12</sup> In his life, man, a purely vegetative being, moves through definite stages: he moves from the sensitive and nutritive phases which are closer to the animal to open up in the moral and intellectual phases. Man is a perfectible creature who is not free: he is determined by certain types of desires he cannot restrain although he longs for absolute liberty, a divine state he will never reach. In his novels, Zola often shows man cursed by his irresistible animal instincts. It is clear that, for the naturalist writers, "man is an animal whose course is determined by his heredity, by the effect of his environment and by the pressures of the moment. This terribly depressing conception robs man of all free will [...]"<sup>13</sup>

Finally, physiognomy was an important scientific discourse at the time. Zola was clearly aware of Cesare Lombroso and his notion of the born criminal before writing *Thérèse Raquin*.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Letourneau, *La physiologie des passions* (Paris, 1868) 11.

<sup>13</sup> Furst and Skrine 18.

As a matter of fact, the born criminal is animalized in different ways such as by his hairy chest and the disproportionate size of his face. In 1985, Malinas states that recent research has taken an interest in the hypothesis of the born criminal: “on trouve chez les individus violents, internés ou emprisonnés, un excès significatif d’anomalies de distribution des chromosomes sexuels.”<sup>14</sup> The born criminals are thus “supermâles” who have the chromosomes XYY. John Caspar Lavater was the main physiognomist scientist who describes and illustrates the resemblances between the countenances of men and animals, supporting Darwin’s claim that “Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.”<sup>15</sup> In *Essays on Physiognomy*, he shows the extent to which animals look like men and vice versa and states that “Of all animals the monkey is known to have most the appearance of the human form.”<sup>16</sup> Lavater even goes further in making “the claim that human resemblances to various animals are highly significant indices to the recognition of character.”<sup>17</sup> Zola uses physiognomy extensively in novels such as *Madeleine Férat*, *Thérèse Raquin*, *La fortune des Rougon* and *La bête humaine*, and this use supplements to an extent a psychological approach. For E. Paul Gauthier, it is clear that “the superb 1820 French edition of Lavater [stands] as a very probable source of Zola’s notions on physiognomy and more particularly on man-animal resemblances.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Malinas 107.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Prometheus, 1998) 643.

<sup>16</sup> John Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. Thomas Holcroft (London, 1848) 227.

<sup>17</sup> E. Paul Gauthier, “New Light on Zola and Physiognomy,” *PMLA* 75.3 (1960): 297.

<sup>18</sup> Gauthier 308.

Garabed Eknayan and Byron Eknayan summarize scientific influences on Zola's novels in the following way: "The interplay of the concepts proposed by Darwin and Bernard, coupled to the hereditary notions of the time, can be construed as the core of the notions of scientific determinism that Zola incorporated into his *Les Rougon-Macquart*."<sup>19</sup> Malinas, a member of the faculty of medicine in Grenoble, analyzes Zola's scientific sources and assesses their value of truth. For instance, Darwin and Lucas are totally ignorant as far as heredity is concerned, which leads Zola to "une synthèse naïve, maladroite même, mais qui montre qu'il a saisi la difficulté d'interprétation."<sup>20</sup> Malinas also regrets that Zola was not made aware of the scientific discoveries of the years 1865-1890 before writing *Le docteur Pascal*. On the whole, Malinas claims that Zola has been provided with questionable scientific data and that "Il est désolant de constater et le sérieux du travail de documentation de Zola et le choix désastreux des auteurs."<sup>21</sup> He concludes that medical practitioners of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are ignorant of science and thus put a brake on the scientific evolution in medicine. Nevertheless Zola has been successful in summarizing Lucas and in having Docteur Pascal present a much clearer classification of heredity. In "Zola et la fêlure," Gilles Deleuze recognizes Zola's tremendous literary power in transforming questionable scientific theories: "combien il serait injuste de ne pas souligner la transformation qu'il leur [aux théories scientifiques et médicales] fait subir, la manière dont il recrée la conception des deux hérédités, puissance poétique qu'il donne à cette conception pour

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<sup>19</sup> Garabed Eknayan, and Byron A. Eknayan, "Medicine and the Case of Emile Zola," *Body and Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*, ed. B. Clarke and W. Aycock (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 1990) 106.

<sup>20</sup> Yves Malinas, "Zola précurseur de la pensée scientifique du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 40 (1970): 113.

<sup>21</sup> Malinas, *Hérédités imaginaires* 59.

en faire la structure nouvelle du « roman familial ».”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Zola beautifully depicts the theory of impregnation, another scientific misconception, in *Madeleine Férat*.

## 2.2. Michelet’s Theories of Pure Love

Before being published as a novel in 1868, *Madeleine Férat* was a series entitled *La Honte* in *L’Événement*. Zola had difficulties with its publication: the author was prosecuted for passages on the theory of impregnation that were considered scandalous because of their immorality. The theory of impregnation implies that a woman is forever so marked by her first inseminator that he even influences inseminations he does not take part in. However, in his preface to the novel, Zola shows that his intention is highly moral:

Cette étude tend à accepter les liens du mariage comme éternels, au point de vue physiologique. La religion, la morale disent à l’homme: « Tu vivras avec une seule femme »; et la science vient lui dire à son tour: « Ta première épouse sera ton épouse éternelle. » J’ai simplement mis en oeuvre cette théorie scientifique. Je crois avoir écrit un livre utile, honnête.<sup>23</sup>

In *Emile Zola raconté par sa fille*, Denise Le Blond-Zola tells that her father was deeply interested in Jules Michelet and his theories of pure love. Michelet’s guide to love entitled *L’amour* published in 1859 influenced Zola remarkably before he wrote *Madeleine Férat*. In a letter to his friend Baille in January 1860, Zola praises *L’amour*: “Une tâche grande et belle, une

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<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Zola et la fêlure,” *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969) 378.

<sup>23</sup> Emile Zola, *Madeleine Férat* (Paris: Mémoire du Livre, 1999) 24.

tâche que Michelet a entreprise, une tâche que j'ose parfois envisager, est de faire revenir l'homme à la femme;" "Michelet fait un dieu de la femme dont l'homme est l'humble adorateur."<sup>24</sup> Michelet indeed forms the basis of Zola's sexual morals. In the same way as Michelet, Zola thinks that promiscuity is a major social problem: "La maladie, à mon avis, dépend surtout de ceci: les jeunes gens mènent une vie polygamique. Je disais tantôt que, dans l'amour, le corps et l'âme sont intimement liés, le véritable amour ne peut exister sans ce mélange."<sup>25</sup> In other words, real love is inconceivable if one leads a promiscuous life. It is also in *L'amour* that Michelet gives more details on the theory of impregnation. Referring to Prosper Lucas, Michelet states that man is favored by Nature and woman is weighed down by fate:

Des faits, venus d'une autre source (*V. Lucas*, t.II, p.60) commencent à établir que l'union d'amour, où l'homme se porte si légèrement, est pour la femme bien autrement profonde et définitive que l'on n'avait jamais pu croire. Elle se donne toute et sans retour. Le phénomène observé sur les femelles inférieures se retrouve, moins régulier, mais se retrouve sur la femme. La fécondation la transforme de manière durable. La veuve donne fréquemment au second époux des enfants qui ressemblent au premier.<sup>26</sup>

In *L'amour*, Michelet follows a newlywed couple's life, in which man and woman are two souls becoming one: "*L'homme et la femme sont deux êtres incomplets et relatifs, n'étant que deux*

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<sup>24</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.1. 129.

<sup>25</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.1. 136.

<sup>26</sup> Jules Michelet, *L'amour* (Paris, 1859) 17.

*moitiés d'un tout*. Ils doivent s'aimer, se respecter."<sup>27</sup> Michelet gives a recipe for a happy relationship: "Le secret pour s'aimer beaucoup, c'est de s'occuper beaucoup l'un de l'autre, de vivre beaucoup ensemble, au plus près et le plus qu'on peut."<sup>28</sup> He also gives advice on furniture, food, servants, hygiene, temptation, on incorporating a baby into the couple and on curing one's heartaches. Woman is a weak, suffering being, who is also fragile and wounded every month. Woman can only work on love and on repairing her man's heart. She is a portrait of pity as such, and she is Nature personified: "Sa bonté embrasse toute la nature. Tout ce qui souffre ou qui est faible, hommes, animaux, est aimé et protégé d'elle."<sup>29</sup> In a chapter entitled "Fécondité intellectuelle," Michelet shows that woman wants to be intellectually, spiritually and morally associated to her husband: she wants to receive his knowledge as well as his beliefs, his faith and his heart. Woman has a special power of germination and incubation: her brain is different from man's and mainly retains poetry and dreams of love. The first insemination clearly has a lasting influence on woman: "La femme fécondée une fois, imprégnée, portera partout son mari en elle,"<sup>30</sup> and "Elle vous appartient à ce point, que, même si l'amant la féconde, c'est un enfant de vous et marqué de vos traits qu'elle lui donnera le plus souvent."<sup>31</sup> Since woman's nature is contradictory in itself, impregnation is the solution: woman is so imprinted by her first lover that she transforms herself into him. She wants to belong to her husband who is her guardian angel, and she wants to become like him. Marriage radically changes a woman:

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<sup>27</sup> Michelet 330.

<sup>28</sup> Michelet 133.

<sup>29</sup> Michelet 400.

<sup>30</sup> Michelet 325.

<sup>31</sup> Michelet 326.



L'épouse imprégnée se fait homme. Envahie de la force mâle qui une fois a mordu en elle, elle y cédera de proche en proche. L'homme gagnera, la pénétrera. Elle sera *lui* de plus en plus. Un an, deux ans, suffiront pour qu'une soie charmante et légère, comme la fleur de l'épi de blé, fleurisse à sa lèvre. Sa voix aussi sera changée. [...] Et combien d'autres changements! L'imitation involontaire de celui qu'elle a au fond de son être se manifeste à son insu, dans l'allure et les mouvements. Vous ne la reconnaîtriez pas, qu'à la regarder seulement marcher, parler ou sourire [...], vous diriez: « Je le reconnais dans sa femme, et elle c'est lui ».<sup>32</sup>

The newlywed metamorphoses into a masculine being: her voice, her writing and her walk change; she receives a downy moustache above the lip if she is a dark-haired woman. Furthermore, her husband becomes father twice over: "Par la vie commune, par la fécondation, l'imprégnation et la métamorphose profonde qui l'accompagne, *il a fait cette femme*. L'époux est le père de l'épouse en ce sens, autant que de l'enfant même."<sup>33</sup> Michelet believes in the psychological influence caused by impregnation, namely in the fact that woman's thinking about her husband during intercourse with her lover makes her child look like her husband. Both Lucas and Darwin strongly refute this interpretation as I will show.

Michelet continues to develop his thoughts on the relationship between man and woman in *La femme*, a treatise praising marriage and family life published in 1860. Michelet mainly

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<sup>32</sup> Michelet 207-08.

<sup>33</sup> Michelet 346.

shows that “*La femme ne vit pas sans l’homme*”<sup>34</sup> and that “*La femme meurt, si elle n’a foyer et protection.*”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Michelet thinks that “le mariage doit être une renaissance,”<sup>36</sup> and that it should involve a trustworthy man in love. He regrets the dichotomy of the strong and the weak in marriage:

Les rites et les symboles du mariage sont bien incomplets jusqu’ici. Ils s’occupent surabondamment d’enseigner au faible qu’il est faible, donc qu’il doit être dépendant. Il serait bien plus instructif, plus original, plus humain, d’enseigner au fort qu’il ne doit pas ici se montrer fort, lui [à la femme] inspirer, à ce moment, les ménagements et la compassion.<sup>37</sup>

Man’s role is to satisfy his wife and to involve her in his reflections. She will then exceed him: “Le bonheur de l’initiateur, c’est de se voir dépassé par l’initié. La femme, cultivée incessamment de l’homme, fécondée de sa pensée, croît bientôt, et un matin se trouve au-dessus de lui.”<sup>38</sup> Michelet does not want to discuss equality between the sexes: “Faites-moi grâce ici de votre grande discussion sur l’égalité des sexes. La femme n’est pas seulement notre égale, mais en bien des points supérieure.”<sup>39</sup> He believes that real love destroys passions such as ambition and pride and renders the partners equal. In summary, woman has two definite roles, loving her

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<sup>34</sup> Jules Michelet, *La femme* (Paris, 1877) 66.

<sup>35</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 65.

<sup>36</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 226.

<sup>37</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 276.

<sup>38</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 325.

<sup>39</sup> Michelet, *Amour* 174.

husband and giving birth to his child: “Je soutiens que, comme femme, elle ne fait son salut qu’en faisant le bonheur de l’homme. Elle doit aimer et enfanter, c’est là son devoir sacré.”<sup>40</sup>

Michelet also notices the animal side surfacing in the desiring human: “A certaines heures, une bête sauvage rugit d’impatience en l’homme, la férocité du désir.”<sup>41</sup> In *L’amour*, Michelet also stresses the fact that “Le mâle est très sauvage”<sup>42</sup> in natural history. In the following quotation, he shows that the sun is an agent of animalization:

Un illustre observateur affirme que sont nombre d’êtres microscopiques, qui, tenus à l’ombre, restent végétaux, s’animalisent au soleil, et deviennent de vrais animaux. Ce qui est sûr, incontesté, accepté de tout le monde, c’est que, loin de la lumière, tout animal végète.<sup>43</sup>

This means that a young wife and her baby both need lots of light. Finally, woman’s desires should be respected in the following three cases: she should not get pregnant without consenting to it; she should be respected in love and should not become a passive instrument that gives pleasure; man should understand that her “crise sanguine”<sup>44</sup> is a difficult time and that as a suffering being she needs his support. Michelet concludes that woman is as pure as man and that her being “une personne *blessée* chaque mois”<sup>45</sup> is an extenuating circumstance. Michelet’s

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<sup>40</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 120.

<sup>41</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 277.

<sup>42</sup> Michelet, *Amour* 118.

<sup>43</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 73.

<sup>44</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 186.

<sup>45</sup> Michelet, *Femme* 411.

conception of woman seems contradictory: she is inferior by nature but at the same time she can surpass man. Hilde Olrik notices another type of contradiction in Michelet: “D’une part il veut la femme-nature, la vierge, l’objet de son désir. D’autre part il veut l’épouse-reflet-de-sa-propre-image. Il ne voit pas qu’en la virilisant il détruit la nature en elle.”<sup>46</sup>

### 2.3. Lucas and the Theory of Impregnation

It is in the second volume of his *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle*, published in 1847, that Lucas discusses the theory of impregnation. Michelet judges this study brilliant and makes the following remarks:

Livre important, capital, qui, malgré certains nuages d’abstractions, n’en signalait pas moins, dans l’auteur, alors inconnu, un grand et excellent esprit. La presse s’en occupa peu. Qu’est devenu l’auteur? je l’ignore. Je l’ai recherché en vain. S’il vit encore, je le prie de recevoir ici le témoignage de ma reconnaissance et de mon admiration.<sup>47</sup>

Lucas wants to determine the influence each parent and previous sexual partners have on the child. Both father and mother can transmit their sensations, their inclinations, their mental faculties and their erotic side. The main difference between the sexes relates to the heredity of madness: “L’histoire de l’aliénation prouve jusqu’à l’évidence, [...] qu’il n’existe point de

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<sup>46</sup> Hilde Olrik, “La théorie de l’imprégnation,” *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 15.1-2 (1986-87): 132.

<sup>47</sup> Michelet, *Amour* 449.

trouble de la pensée qui ne puisse provenir et souvent ne provienne du côté maternel.”<sup>48</sup> It happens that the child does not inherit any of his/her parents’ features. These occurrences do not follow the law of heredity but the law of “innéité” and can be due to a reversing heredity, a return to previous generations. Yet the heredity of influence is a strange phenomenon which remains incomprehensible: “Il découle, au contraire, de l’hérédité, d’autres types qui sont non-seulement [sic] d’une date différente de celle de la conception de l’être, mais qui sont à la fois étrangers d’origine et de substance au produit.”<sup>49</sup> Animals such as aphids and butterflies are good examples of this phenomenon: both species have the capacity to engender without copulation because a single insemination can be used for two to four generations. Moreover, superior species of animal and man can be examples of the following circumstance: “la représentation de conjoints antérieurs dans la nature physique et morale du produit.”<sup>50</sup> The crossing of a donkey and a mare or of a pig and a boar shows the continuing influence of the mare and the boar respectively on further inseminations in which these two do not take part. In humans, the heredity of influence is due to two facts: “*la ressemblance du fils adultérin à son père putatif [...]* [et] *la ressemblance des enfants au mari, dans les cas d’adultère.*”<sup>51</sup> Lucas does not agree with thinkers who believe that this type of heredity of influence is psychological. He also does not believe that it is due to the mother’s thoughts and imagination at the moment of procreation, namely that she is thinking about her husband whom she is betraying with her lover. In *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, Darwin cites Lucas as a real expert on the

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<sup>48</sup> Prosper Lucas, *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1847) 27.

<sup>49</sup> Lucas 54.

<sup>50</sup> Lucas 57.

<sup>51</sup> Lucas 61.

laws of inheritance. Darwin claims that “Some physiologists have attempted to account for these remarkable results from a previous impregnation, by the imagination of the mother having been strongly affected; but it will hereafter be seen that there are very slight grounds for any such belief.”<sup>52</sup> Lucas believes that this perception is misconceived since it does not occur in the animal world:

Il n'existe pas de préoccupation mentale du genre de celle qu'ils [autres penseurs] ont signalée, chez les animaux. Il n'y a pas chez eux de crainte de surprise, il n'y a pas d'adultère. Il en est de même des veuves, épouses d'un second mari, dont les enfants rappellent, ou les qualités, ou les traits du premier.<sup>53</sup>

For Lucas, this phenomenon of impregnation is purely physiological: the mother cannot project her imagination on her fetus. He concludes that the heredity of influence is due to the following law: “la même loi d'influence du type des conjoints antérieurs sur la nature physique ou morale du produit de conceptions qui leur sont par le fait étrangères.”<sup>54</sup>

#### **2.4. Myth of the Impregnated Woman as Animal in *Madeleine Férat***

It is in *Madeleine Férat* that Zola presents the scientific implications of the theory of impregnation, demonstrating that “le premier amant qui déflore une fille la marque

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Darwin, “Concluding Remarks,” *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* (New York, 1896) 437.

<sup>53</sup> Lucas 63.

<sup>54</sup> Lucas 64.

indélibilement; celle-ci ressent dans sa chair qu'elle lui appartient à jamais."<sup>55</sup> Both Madeleine and Guillaume have androgynous features. Madeleine's face is divided into two: the higher part is of masculine toughness while the lower part is of exquisite delicateness. Her husband Guillaume is a proud young man with a feminine sensibility. This androgynous presence makes Guillaume and Madeleine incarnate the perfect ill-fated couple. Furthermore, Guillaume cannot detach himself from his wife because he is possessed by her. Her temperament is stronger than his, and she has dominated him since the beginning of their relationship. He has always been "d'une sensibilité de femme"<sup>56</sup> and the weaker creature in their couple: he even says that his wife embodies man in their relationship. Thus a reversed impregnation, which is not accounted for in the text, comes to light: as in *Thérèse Raquin*, where Laurent endures Thérèse's influence on him, Guillaume seems literally impregnated by Madeleine. Guillaume is as full of Madeleine as Madeleine is full of Jacques, her first lover. As soon as Madeleine reveals to Guillaume that he is not her first lover, he sees her in a different light: "cet amant, dont il retrouvait le souvenir vivant et ineffaçable dans chaque geste, dans chaque parole de sa compagne lui paraissait se dresser entre eux, maintenant que son ombre avait été évoquée."<sup>57</sup> During their relationship, Madeleine never feels passion for Jacques, but she is rather marked by him: "elle reçut plutôt son empreinte, elle se sentit devenir lui, elle comprit qu'il prenait une entière possession de sa chair et de son esprit."<sup>58</sup> When Jacques leaves to work as a military surgeon in Cochinchine, Madeleine feels that his kisses will burn her forever and that they are deeply embedded in her body. In spite of

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<sup>55</sup> Claude Seassau, *Emile Zola et le réalisme symbolique* (Paris: Corti, 1989) 212.

<sup>56</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 35.

<sup>57</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 48.

<sup>58</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 67-68.

these circumstances, Madeleine and Guillaume live six months of felicity and of love in their own little world. The fact that they love each other without knowing each other reveals the first obstacle: Madeleine learns that her first lover Jacques is Guillaume's best friend.

After his father's death, Guillaume, accompanied by Madeleine, returns to La Noiraude, where they start a new and quiet life. Guillaume discovers a new woman in Madeleine: she is no longer his mistress but his lover. The first time Guillaume proposes marriage to Madeleine, she refuses because of her memories with Jacques; shortly after she changes her mind hoping that this union will make Jacques leave her body. In their first year of marriage, Madeleine gives birth to a girl named Lucie. The new mother feels better and seems to become unmarked by Jacques:

[T]out son être s'était apaisé, le mariage avait mis en elle une sorte de maturité précoce; son corps prenait un léger embonpoint, il avait des mouvements plus doux, plus mesurés; ses cheveux roux, soigneusement noués, n'étaient plus qu'un admirable signe de force, que de puissants bandeaux encadrant sa face devenue placide. La fille faisait place à la mère, à la femme féconde, assise dans la plénitude de sa beauté.<sup>59</sup>

Zola clearly underlines the positive force maternity conferred upon Madeleine.

Disaster is announced when Jacques returns alive from Cochinchine. The military surgeon is transformed: he has a bestial face, and he has lived an animal life satisfying his flesh but not his heart. Guillaume announces to his friend that he has become child again and has found a mother in his wife. Jacques tells him that marrying his mistress is a mistake because such

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<sup>59</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 153.



unions always turn out badly. After telling Guillaume the whole truth about her previous relationship with Jacques, Madeleine avoids Jacques and convinces her husband to flee. They are compared to wounded animals hiding: “dans l’effarement du coup brusque qui venait de les écraser, ils ne pouvaient résister à ce mouvement instinctif des animaux blessés, courant se cacher au fond de quelque trou.”<sup>60</sup> La Noiraude is their refuge, where Madeleine and Guillaume lead an animal life: they hibernate and only enjoy physical but painful pleasures. They seem to be struck by imbecility. The narrator uses the same comparison later when Guillaume feels tracked down like a hunted animal; it is Jacques and their memories associated with him that hound them, resembling “la meute hurlante qui nous traque.”<sup>61</sup> When Madeleine stays in the Grand-Cerf Inn in Lyon with her husband, she evokes moments she spent with Jacques in the same room. While Jacques was smoking in the room, she was looking through the window, which looks out on the farmyard. Madeleine says the following concerning her relationship with animals: “j’adore les bêtes, je m’amusais des heures entières de la gloutonnerie des poules et des grâces amoureuses des pigeons.”<sup>62</sup> At that time, Jacques was kissing Madeleine in the neck like a clucking chick: “Il avait inventé de me baiser sur le cou, par petits baisers légers et rapides, de façon à produire avec ses lèvres, à peine posées sur ma peau, une sorte de caquètement continu, assez semblable à celui des poussins.”<sup>63</sup> These details on the protagonist’s relationship with animals foreshadow her becoming an animal.

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<sup>60</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 203.

<sup>61</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 276.

<sup>62</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 281.

<sup>63</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 281.

Jacques' impregnation of Madeleine is overtly revealed when Guillaume notices that Lucie looks like Jacques: "Lucie ressemblait vaguement à Jacques, et cette ressemblance devenait frappante lorsque l'enfant plissait la bouche et le front. L'ancien chirurgien [Jacques] avait d'ordinaire cette moue d'homme positif."<sup>64</sup> Guillaume believes that Lucie has been conceived in moral adultery:

Il croyait qu'elle avait évoqué le souvenir de Jacques, au moment où elle concevait Lucie entre ses bras. Les cauchemars du jeune homme renaissaient dans son cerveau éperdu; il pensait de nouveau à cet étrange adultère moral dont sa femme avait dû se rendre coupable en laissant son imagination prendre les baisers de son mari pour les baisers de son amant. De là, la ressemblance de sa fille avec cet amant. A cette heure, il possédait une preuve; il ne pouvait plus douter du rôle odieux qu'il avait joué. Son enfant ne lui appartenait pas; elle était le fruit de l'union honteuse de Madeleine avec un fantôme.<sup>65</sup>

The narrator stresses the physiological aspects of this scientific phenomenon: "L'idée que la ressemblance de Lucie avec le premier amant de sa mère était un cas assez fréquent, tenant à certaines lois physiologiques inconnues encore, ne pouvait lui venir, en un pareil moment d'angoisse."<sup>66</sup> As Michelet describes it in *L'amour*, impregnation gives Madeleine masculine traits, which demonstrates the fact that Jacques is still inscribed inside her. It is not tenderness but flesh that still links Jacques to Madeleine:

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<sup>64</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 221.

<sup>65</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 222.

<sup>66</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 223.

Lorsque Madeleine s'était oubliée dans les bras de Jacques, sa chair vierge avait pris l'empreinte ineffaçable du jeune homme. Il y eut alors mariage intime, indestructible. Elle se trouvait en pleine sève, à cet âge où l'organisme de la femme mûrit et se féconde au contact de l'homme ; son corps puissant, son tempérament mesuré se laissa pénétrer d'autant plus profondément qu'il était riche de sang et sain d'humeurs ; elle s'abandonna avec tout son calme, toute sa franchise, à cette transmission charnelle établie entre son amant et elle, si bien que sa nature froide devint ainsi une cause nouvelle qui rendit plus complète et plus durable la possession de son être entier. On eût dit que Jacques, en la serrant contre sa poitrine, la moulait à son image, lui donnait de ses muscles et de ses os, la faisait sienne pour la vie. Un hasard l'avait jetée à cet homme, un hasard la retenait dans son étreinte, et, pendant qu'elle était là, par aventure, toujours sur le point de devenir veuve, des fatalités physiologiques la liaient étroitement à lui, l'emplissaient de lui. Lorsque, après une année de ce travail secret du sang et des nerfs, le chirurgien s'éloigna, il laissa la jeune femme éternellement frappée à la marque de ses baisers, possédée à ce point qu'elle n'était plus seule maîtresse de son corps ; elle avait en elle un autre être, des éléments virils qui la complétaient et l'asseyaient dans sa force. C'était là un phénomène purement physique.<sup>67</sup>

This long quotation shows that impregnation is determined by fate and that it is a purely physiological process. Guillaume has Madeleine's heart but her body still belongs to Jacques. Indeed, Madeleine is deflowered by Jacques and thus forever marked by their first sexual act.

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<sup>67</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 231.

Yet the type of fecundation necessary to make the theory of impregnation function remains unclear. Zola, Michelet and Lucas do not give details about the specific role of semen and about the contemporary precautions to avoid pregnancies. It is known that condoms made out of vulcanized rubber were mass-produced by Goodyear and Hancock in 1844. Before that, condoms made out of animal intestines were available, but since they were expensive, their usage was limited to the wealthier classes of society. Yet “Après 1870, capotes ou rubans de sûreté fabriqués en boyau de mouton dominant le marché.”<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, Guillaume also notices resembling physical traits between Madeleine and Jacques:

Madeleine avait, par moments, des airs de ressemblance avec Jacques. Autrefois, partageant la vie du jeune homme, vivant dans son contact, elle s’était laissée aller à avoir ses goûts, ses façons d’être. Pendant une année, elle avait reçu de lui une sorte d’éducation physique qui la formait à son image : elle répétait les mots qu’il prononçait d’ordinaire, elle reproduisait à son insu ses gestes familiers, même les intonations de sa voix. Ce penchant à l’imitation, qui donne à toute femme, au bout de quelque temps, une parenté de manières avec l’homme dans les bras duquel elle vit, la mena jusqu’à modifier certains de ses traits, jusqu’à prendre l’expression habituelle du visage de Jacques.<sup>69</sup>

Like Michelet, the narrator is speculating on the consequences of impregnation, since science has not yet clearly determined how physiology influences this phenomenon. There is a transference

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<sup>68</sup> Laure Adler, *Secrets d’alcôve: histoire du couple de 1830 à 1930* (Paris: Hachette, 1983) 116.

<sup>69</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 307.

of masculine features to Madeleine, a transformation which is physiologically related. The narrator even goes so far as to suggest that Jacques has put new blood into her. When he watches his wife undress, Guillaume is frightened and disgusted by his wife's flesh. He sees her as a cruel courtesan whom he cannot recognize. Because she is constantly thinking about Jacques and the fear associated to him, Madeleine retrieves his accents, his attitudes and his face. Madeleine suffers from Jacques' possession of her body: she feels it as an endless rape. It is at night that Madeleine totally belongs to her lover. She feels hugged and kissed by him, she calls his name and wakes up half-naked. Madeleine is ashamed of herself, she does not know "si elle était une femme ou un démon."<sup>70</sup> Madeleine thinks that Jacques himself will have the remedy to her pains, but being in the presence of Jacques makes Madeleine weak and submissive. Instead of getting help as planned, Jacques gives her an intense moment of sexual pleasure. She becomes a horse: "Elle obéit à son étreinte comme un cheval qui reconnaît les genoux puissants d'un maître."<sup>71</sup> Her pleasure is compared to a dangerous fall, to swinging into emptiness. This animal image of the horse reminds one of a domesticated animal trained to submission and to having sex only when in heat. Madeleine definitely endures subjection to impregnation in spite of herself. Since there is neither a final liberating effect nor an emancipation, her proximity to the horse is not a becoming-animal in the Deleuzian sense of the term. Instead, Madeleine is more of a slave who dies of this terrible curse. It is at the same moment that her daughter dies of smallpox. When dead, Lucie has Jacques' lips, the ones Madeleine has just kissed voluptuously. Madeleine poisons herself to escape her ordeal after realizing that her sexual instincts are stronger than her maternal ones.

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<sup>70</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 315.

<sup>71</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 349.

In *Madeleine Férat*, the torments caused by impregnation are symbolized by the repulsive animal: we see that one character imagines that Madeleine turns into a toad. This animal metamorphosis goes counter to the traditional fairy tale where the prince as toad becomes prince again when kissed. Madeleine is transformed into a toad as a consequence of Jacques' kiss, an indelible mark left on her body. Geneviève is a very pious family servant who detects sin in Madeleine: "Elle crut apercevoir enfin la bête immonde cachée sous cette peau nacréée, dans cette chair de perdition, et n'aurait pas été trop étonnée de voir le corps superbe et voluptueux de la jeune femme se changer en un monstrueux crapaud."<sup>72</sup> Geneviève never stops seeing Madeleine as pure evil incarnate in her body. Geneviève puts an animal curse on her: she wants Madeleine's skin to become black and covered with "un poil de bête."<sup>73</sup> Madeleine herself wonders whether Satan is not living in her heart, and whether she thinks that her beauty has become a mask resembling "quelque animal monstrueux."<sup>74</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings also links impregnation to sin: "L'imprégnation, marque indélébile de la faute originelle, elle aussi, est une forme d'expiation. [...] C'est là une manière inéluctable d'enfermer la coupable dans son péché."<sup>75</sup> As Michelet predicts, impregnation is a natural fact which cannot be avoided by women, although it has not been scientifically explained yet:

[L]a nature compatissante a pitié du premier amour. Au moment où la femme paraît tellement distraite de celui qui l'aime, elle lui appartient plus encore. L'imprégnation profonde qu'elle a reçue de lui subsiste, gagne et gagnera.

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<sup>72</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 179.

<sup>73</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 298.

<sup>74</sup> Zola, *Madeleine* 296.

<sup>75</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L'éros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 21-22.

L'amour actif dont elle entoure l'enfant ne fait rien à l'amour passif, involontaire, d'autant plus invincible, qui la possède. Elle songe moins à son mari et l'aime moins de la pensée, mais du sang davantage, davantage de sa vie transformée. Pendant cet oubli apparent qui semble les séparer, se confirme la métamorphose qui les confond de plus en plus.<sup>76</sup>

## 2.5. The Theory of Impregnation in *Thérèse Raquin* and *L'Assommoir*

In 1867, one year before *Madeleine Féral*, Zola published *Thérèse Raquin*, in which he alludes to the theory of impregnation using it rather as a rhetorical trope than as a scientific argument. Thérèse and Laurent plan the murder of Camille, Thérèse's cousin and husband. After their crime, Laurent and Thérèse get married, and five months later they are expecting a baby. Because of their constant crisis of remorse, Thérèse wants to get rid of the baby monster she carries: she makes Laurent hit her so hard that she has a miscarriage. The following passage shows the indelible mark left by Camille on Thérèse: "La pensée d'avoir un enfant de Laurent lui paraissait monstrueuse, sans qu'elle s'expliquât pourquoi. Elle avait vaguement peur d'accoucher d'un noyé. Il lui semblait sentir dans ses entrailles le froid d'un cadavre dissous et amolli."<sup>77</sup> Here impregnation shows the tremendous influence Camille still has on Thérèse after his death. Thérèse sins in betraying and killing her first husband: the fact that her baby is like a drowned body metaphorically represents her inevitable guilt toward Camille, whom the adulterous couple killed by drowning.

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<sup>76</sup> Michelet, *Amour* 243.

<sup>77</sup> Emile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) 278.

In *Le docteur Pascal*, the scientist recapitulates the Rougon-Macquart genealogy and recalls only one example of heredity of influence, in *L'assommoir* published in 1877: “Anna, la fille de Gervaise et de Coupeau, ressemblait étonnamment, surtout dans son enfance, à Lantier, le premier amant de sa mère, comme s’il avait imprégné celle-ci à jamais [...]”<sup>78</sup> Docteur Pascal sees Lantier’s influence on Nana as a child, but this mark is also noticeable later in her life. When Coupeau’s family sees the baby Nana for the first time, they notice a lack of resemblance with her father:

[E]lle [Mme Lorilleux] chercha la ressemblance. On manqua se disputer. Lorilleux, qui allongeait le cou derrière les femmes, répétait que la petite n’avait rien de Coupeau; un peu le nez peut-être, et encore! C’était toute sa mère avec des yeux d’ailleurs; pour sûr, ces yeux-là ne venaient pas de la famille.<sup>79</sup>

When Gervaise learns that Lantier is in the area, she believes to be strong enough to reject him if he tries to have her. The mere mention of his name makes her shiver: “Depuis bientôt sept ans, elle n’avait plus entendu parler de Lantier. Jamais elle n’aurait cru que le nom de Lantier, ainsi murmuré à son oreille, lui causerait une pareille chaleur au creux de l’estomac.”<sup>80</sup> When Lantier moves to live with her and her family, Gervaise is greatly troubled:

Elle éprouvait au creux de l’estomac cette chaleur dont elle s’était sentie brûlée, le jour des confidences de Virginie. Sa grande peur venait de ce qu’elle redoutait

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<sup>78</sup> Zola, *Docteur Pascal* 164-65.

<sup>79</sup> Emile Zola, *L'assommoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 130-31.

<sup>80</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 225.



d'être sans force, s'il la surprenait un soir toute seule et s'il s'avisait de l'embrasser. Elle pensait trop à lui, elle restait trop pleine de lui.<sup>81</sup>

Gervaise is then so upset by her first inseminator that she does not even recognize her own husband:

[E]lle laissait entendre que Lantier était son mari autant que Coupeau, peut-être même davantage. Est-ce qu'elle ne l'avait pas connu à quatorze ans? est-ce qu'elle n'avait pas deux enfants de lui? Eh bien, dans ces conditions, tout se pardonnait, personne ne pouvait lui jeter la pierre. Elle se disait dans la loi de la nature.<sup>82</sup>

As already predicted, Gervaise cannot resist Lantier and has sexual relations with him in front of Nana. She does not feel more love for Lantier than for Coupeau: she only finds the former cleaner. Her sexual conduct renders her similar to an animal: "Elle ressemblait aux chattes qui aiment à se coucher en rond sur le linge blanc."<sup>83</sup> This comparison underlines not only Gervaise's desire for cleanliness but also her femininity since *chatte* also has a sexual connotation. While living at Gervaise's, Lantier takes care of Nana's education. Already at six years old, Nana is a dissolute child: she is said to become a "vaurienne finie."<sup>84</sup> Nana is also

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<sup>81</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 285-86.

<sup>82</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 330.

<sup>83</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 329.

<sup>84</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 188.

definitely steeped in vice: “Elle était dans le vice comme un poisson dans l’eau.”<sup>85</sup> Lantier continues by teaching her to dance and to speak slang; he is also the only one to defend Nana when her family criticizes her excessively developed sensuality. The narrator implies that Nana physically looks like Lantier, but it is clear that she has also inherited debauchery from him: Nana will conquer men in the same manner that Lantier conquers women. In *L’assommoir*, Zola still believes in a less tragic version of the theory of impregnation: Gervaise is marked by her first lover to the point of not being able to resist his advances and to the point of having a child with Coupeau that resembles Lantier. The main difference with Madeleine lies in the fact that impregnation is not fatal to Gervaise, since she does not directly die of this sin. Finally, Zola seems to change his mind regarding the theory of impregnation after writing *L’assommoir* since he does not apply it to later novels.

## **2.6. The Scientific Myth of Impregnation from a Feminist Perspective**

In the nineteenth century, the theory of impregnation has crucial repercussions on the myth of the body. Olrik notes that Michelet views it from a romantic perspective, while Zola considers the impregnated woman a beast having no control of her own body. Both Zola and Michelet are in favor of monogamy. Zola takes the theory of impregnation literally in *Madeleine Férat*, but in *L’assommoir*, impregnation is only implied since Zola leaves the scientific explanations behind. Olrik also shows that the theory of impregnation dates from Aristotle and that “Quant à l’espèce humaine, la théorie s’est [...] maintenue jusqu’au vingtième siècle se transformant en mythe.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Zola, *Assommoir* 427.

<sup>86</sup> Olrik 129.

In animal husbandry, the theory of impregnation was named telegony, as the influence of a sire on subsequent progeny of a mother when he is not the father, and was considered as factual for seventy years. James Cossar Ewart disproved the theory of telegony in animal breeding at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his study entitled *Zola et les hérédités imaginaires*, Malinas also perceives the theory of impregnation as a legend:

De pareilles légendes ont la vie dure et représentent un folklore de haute tradition. En 1907, Martineau discute encore sans rire la théorie de l'imprégnation et en 1933, elle était adoptée comme un des dogmes du racisme national-socialiste. Zola n'a fait que suivre les croyances de son époque, cautionnées par la tradition, par Darwin, par les éleveurs et vétérinaires et par le plus grand accoucheur du temps.<sup>87</sup>

Malinas gives 1824 as the year when the theory of impregnation was discredited by Jean Prévost and Jean-Baptiste Dumas, who demonstrate that the contact between sperm and ovule is necessary for fertilization. It is thus not possible to admit the heredity of influence after 1824, but Zola starts writing on it in 1868 and appears to stop only after the publication of *L'assommoir* in 1877. Lucas even includes the theory of impregnation in his *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle* in 1847, twenty-three years after the theory has been strongly refuted.

The theory of impregnation is a myth of creation: it is a way for men to own the weaker sex and to mark the Other. Bertrand-Jennings claims that man views his companion as modeling clay: "Dans ce mythe pseudo-scientifique apparaît en réalité la conviction que l'homme fait la

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<sup>87</sup> Malinas, *Hérédités imaginaires* 77.

femme, qu'il façonne à son image une pâte informe livrée à lui dans le chaos de son inexistence."<sup>88</sup> The theory of impregnation also shows men's fear of adultery. It has implications for feminist discourse: the indelible mark left by a first lover or husband gives pessimistic visions of Madeleine, Gervaise and Thérèse. In *Le deuxième sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir mentions impregnation as a myth of masculine domination over women even in 1949:

Mais la femme ne flatte pas seulement la vanité sociale de l'homme; elle lui permet aussi un orgueil plus intime; il s'enchant de la domination qu'il exerce sur elle; [...] ce n'est pas seulement érotiquement, c'est moralement, intellectuellement que le mari « forme » son épouse ; il l'éduque, la marque, lui impose son empreinte. Une des rêveries auxquelles l'homme se complaît, c'est celle de l'imprégnation des choses par sa volonté, du modelage de leur forme, de la pénétration de leur substance : la femme est par excellence la « pâte molle » qui se laisse passivement malaxer et façonner, tout en cédant elle résiste, ce qui permet à l'action masculine de se perpétuer. Une matière trop plastique s'abolit par sa docilité ; ce qu'il y a de précieux chez la femme c'est que quelque chose en elle échappe indéfiniment à toute étreinte ; ainsi l'homme est maître d'une réalité qui est d'autant plus digne d'être maîtrisée qu'elle le déborde. Elle éveille en lui un être ignoré qu'il reconnaît avec fierté comme soi-même ; dans les sages orgies conjugales il découvre la splendeur de son animalité : il est le Mâle ; corrélativement la femme est femelle, mais ce mot prend à l'occasion les plus flatteuses résonances : la femelle qui couve, allaite, lèche ses petits, les défend, les sauve au péril de sa vie est un exemple pour l'humanité ; avec émotion l'homme

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<sup>88</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 123.

réclame de sa compagne cette patience, ce dévouement ; c'est encore la Nature, mais pénétrée de toutes les vertus utiles à la société, à la famille, au chef de famille que celui-ci entend enfermer au foyer.<sup>89</sup>

In brief, the theory of impregnation becomes a legend in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even after it has been proven that a child cannot be conceived without one of the partners present in the sexual act. Even a renowned physiologist such as Lucas believes in 1847 that woman can conceive at any day of the month and even during her menstruations.<sup>90</sup> Fear about sexuality and a certain view of sexual relations in which woman has the passive role are the reasons why a legend such as the theory of influence arises from scientific theory. Zola's application of the theory of impregnation in *Madeleine Férat* does not lack originality: even Guillaume, the effeminate man, is marked by his wife.

As I have shown, the theory of impregnation seems to offer a pessimistic view of woman, and it is now time to link this myth to Zola's complex feminist stance. In an 1891 article, Zola bases his opinion of feminism on the conception of Nature:

Je m'en remets à la nature, comme en toutes questions. La femme, ainsi que l'homme d'ailleurs, ne sera jamais que ce que la nature veut qu'elle soit. Le reste, tout ce qu'on peut rêver, ne saurait être qu'anormal, dangereux, et d'une parfaite vanité, heureusement.

Dans l'ordre de la justice, dans l'ordre du bonheur, certes la femme doit être l'égale de l'homme. Mais, si, physiologiquement, elle est autre, c'est que sa

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<sup>89</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) 289-90.

<sup>90</sup> Lucas 917.

fonction est autre, et elle ne peut que s'atrophier et disparaître à tenter d'en sortir.<sup>91</sup>

Zola claims that woman should be man's equal in the best of worlds but that this equality is dependent upon the decision of Nature. In an interview Zola gave to the *Gil Blas* in August 1896, he discusses feminism from a social point of view, which is in total opposition with the quotation based on Nature:

Féministe? mais je ne le suis pas non plus. J'ai eu à m'occuper dans mes ouvrages de la femme, de sa condition sociale, de sa situation vis-à-vis de l'homme et devant la loi, mais je ne l'ai fait qu'en artiste, comme romancier seulement. Je ne suis certes pas hostile au mouvement féministe, à l'émancipation de la femme, mais n'exagérons rien. On a trop longtemps traité la femme en esclave et on n'a que trop tardé à lui reconnaître certains droits, mais de là à la considérer comme l'égale de l'homme, à la traiter comme telle, il y a loin. Ni moralement ni physiquement, elle ne peut prétendre à cette égalité et l'émancipation ne doit se faire que dans la mesure de nos moeurs, de nos usages, je dirai même des préjugés de notre édifice social.<sup>92</sup>

Zola writes on feminine representation as an artist in his novels. He does not believe in equality between the sexes: he only thinks that woman should be treated as a human being. This quote

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<sup>91</sup> Emile Zola, "Sur le féminisme," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol.14 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-70) 844.

<sup>92</sup> Dorothy E. Speirs, and Dolorès A. Signori, *Entretiens avec Zola* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1990) 170.

ends with a political statement: woman's emancipation can only occur in relation to social traditions and prejudices. Zola is clearly pessimistic and does not give any scientific arguments to sustain his opinion. Moreover, in a review of Eugène Pelletan's *La mère*, Zola proposes a liberation of women and the concept of marriage as an intellectual union between two mentally equal beings:

Le remède est simple, étant donnée la mission de la femme. Cette mission est, je le répète, d'être la collaboratrice de l'homme dans l'oeuvre commune, la compagne fidèle, l'appui certain, l'égale conciliante et dévouée. Il faut donc, avant tout, libérer la femme, libérer son corps, libérer son coeur, libérer son intelligence.

Il faut l'instruire, la rendre notre soeur par la pensée. Là est la grande rédemption. Que la femme au foyer ne soit pas seulement une ménagère et une machine à reproduction, qu'elle soit une âme qui comprenne l'âme de l'époux, une pensée qui communique avec la pensée de l'homme choisi et aimé. La famille sera fondée dès que la mère et le père seront unis jusque dans leur intelligence. Alors, il y aura vraiment mariage, il y aura pénétration complète.<sup>93</sup>

Yet, this intellectual union cannot occur without a total reevaluation of feminine education. As a matter of fact, Zola views the education of girls in France as "médiocre et incomplète:"<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Emile Zola, "La mère," *Mes haines* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1928) 94.

<sup>94</sup> Emile Zola, "Femmes du monde," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol.14 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-70) 682.

Tout le mal vient de la sottise dans laquelle nous maintenons volontairement nos compagnes; nous ne pouvons sympathiser avec elles, nous en faisons des êtres différents de nous, nous les dédaignons ensuite, et nous désertons nos demeures. Je demande formellement que l'on démolisse tous les pensionnats de jeunes filles existants, et que, sur leurs ruines, on bâtit des collèges où nos filles seront élevées comme nos fils. Au sortir des collèges, filles et garçons se tendront la main en camarades et se comprendront.<sup>95</sup>

Although Zola demands equal education for boys and girls, as Chantal Jennings shows, he does not believe or show in his novels that men and women share identical abilities. For instance, Christine of *L'oeuvre* is separated from the notion of art, which is clearly Claude's field. Clémence in *Le ventre de Paris* further illustrates Zola's disapprobation of woman as man's equal: "Clémence, [...], est une figure grotesque, prétentieuse et artificielle; et pourtant son plus grand crime est de discuter politique avec des hommes au café."<sup>96</sup> Zola was also an early advocate of divorce: "Après avoir libéré l'intelligence, il faut libérer le coeur et le corps. Il faut donner à la femme l'égalité devant la loi et rétablir le divorce."<sup>97</sup> Yet in later articles, he is more cautious and he is not convinced that divorce would improve humankind. He also sees the man as responsible when an adulterous woman is assassinated by her husband: "C'est le mari qui est coupable de la faute de la femme. Quand on épouse une malade, il faut la faire soigner. Quand

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<sup>95</sup> Zola, *Mère* 94.

<sup>96</sup> Chantal Jennings, "Zola féministe? II," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 45 (1973): 14.

<sup>97</sup> Zola, *Mère* 94.



on épouse une femme saine, une femme qui a son bon sens et dont les nerfs sont équilibrés, il est aisé d'en faire un honnête coeur.”<sup>98</sup>

In conclusion, like that of Michelet, who was an early influence on the naturalist author's sexual morals, Zola's conception of womanhood is ambiguous. He seems to stand for feminist rights, only when they are beneficial to the common good and to the social order: “En vérité Zola ne souhaite l'épanouissement de la femme que parce qu'il voit en elle la base même de la société et, qu'à l'en croire, l'avenir dépend de sa réhabilitation. A ses yeux elle n'est que le moyen qui permettra la libération de l'homme et éventuellement l'affranchissement général de l'humanité.”<sup>99</sup> I will show further illustrations of this claim in the discussion of the female figures in *Travail*. Finally, the theory of impregnation, which appears in both animal and human worlds in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has a strong influence on Zola's depiction of Madeleine Férat. Madeleine's first lover leaves an indelible mark on her body, a physiological sign which makes Zola compare her to a repulsive animal. In any case, Zola's search for truth in writing *Madeleine Férat* is superior to his questionable scientific evidence; he shows that literature can go further than science and in doing so, Zola goes beyond truth.

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<sup>98</sup> Emile Zola, “Lettres parisiennes: sur l'adultère,” *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol.14 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-70) 87.

<sup>99</sup>Jennings 9-10.

### 3. Albine, Désirée, Emile and Badiou's Ethics of Human and Animal Rights

#### 3.1. The Role of the Animal in Zola's Life and Thoughts

From reading Zola's correspondence, it becomes clear that he was an animal lover. In a letter to his friend Baille in 1859, he tells the story of the warbler which died at his door:

Une malheureuse fauvette est venue tomber sur la neige, devant ma porte. Je l'ai prise et je l'ai portée devant le feu; la pauvre a ouvert un instant les yeux, je l'ai sentie palpiter dans mes mains, puis elle est morte. J'en ai presque pleuré; toi qui m'appelais l'ami des bêtes, tu comprendras peut-être cela.<sup>1</sup>

This anecdote shows how much Zola is touched by the death of a little bird. In another letter to Baille in 1860, Zola gives more details on his feelings toward animals:

J'aime tout ce qui est faible et petit, tout ce qui souffre; j'aime les animaux, parce qu'ils ne peuvent exprimer par la voix leurs souffrances, leurs besoins. J'aime l'homme comme un pauvre blessé, et si je m'emporte en considérant qu'il est l'auteur de ses blessures, je trouve pourtant des larmes pour le plaindre.<sup>2</sup>

Zola thus views the human as a suffering animal, but he makes a crucial distinction between his feelings toward the human and the animal: the human is responsible for his wounds while the animal is not.

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 116-17.

<sup>2</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.1. 206.

In March 1896, Zola published an article entitled “L’amour des bêtes” in *Le Figaro*. He explains that people can be divided into three classes as far as their feeling towards animals is concerned: animal lovers, animal haters and persons apathetic toward animals. According to Zola, it would be very enlightening to determine the specific proportions of these three classes, because this may reveal a general rule. In this interesting article on his relation to animals, Zola wants to determine the reasons why he feels “fraternal compassion” and “fearful pity” when he encounters a stray dog in the street:

Pourquoi la vue de cette bête, allant et venant, flairant le monde, effarée, visiblement désespérée de ne pas retrouver son maître, me cause-t-elle une pitié si pleine d’angoisse, qu’une telle rencontre me gâte absolument une promenade?

Pourquoi, jusqu’au soir, jusqu’au lendemain, le souvenir de ce chien perdu me hante-t-il d’une sorte de désespérance, me revient-il sans cesse en un élancement de fraternelle compassion, dans le souci de savoir ce qu’il fait, où il est, si on l’a recueilli, s’il mange, s’il n’est pas à grelotter au coin de quelque borne ?

Pourquoi ai-je ainsi, au fond de ma mémoire, de grandes tristesses qui s’y réveillent parfois, des chiens sans maîtres, rencontrés il y a dix ans, il y a vingt ans, et qui sont restés en moi comme la souffrance même du pauvre être qui ne peut parler et que son travail, dans nos villes ne peut nourrir ?

Pourquoi la souffrance d’une bête me bouleverse-t-elle ainsi ? Pourquoi ne puis-je supporter l’idée qu’une bête souffre, au point de me relever la nuit, l’hiver, pour m’assurer que mon chat a bien sa tasse d’eau ? Pourquoi toutes les bêtes de

la création sont-elles mes petites parentes, pourquoi leur idée seule m'emplit-elle de miséricorde, de tolérance et de tendresse ?

Pourquoi les bêtes sont-elles toutes de ma famille, comme les hommes, autant que les hommes ?<sup>3</sup>

In the last rhetorical question, Zola perceives the human and the animal as one and places them on the same level. Zola gives the following answer to his questions: “je crois bien que ma charité pour les bêtes est faite, comme je le disais, de ce qu’elles ne peuvent parler, expliquer leurs besoins, indiquer leurs maux.”<sup>4</sup> Zola clearly feels pity toward animals that have less developed faculties than men. The fact that animals cannot speak is crucial in this context. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin believes that language is the main distinction between humans and animals: “The lower animals differ from man solely in his almost infinitely larger power of associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas; and this obviously depends on the high development of his mental powers.”<sup>5</sup> Moral sense and conscience are very important in delimiting humans from animals: humans cannot live without thinking and without reflection. Désirée, who is deprived of moral sense and of conscience in *La faute de l’abbé Mouret*, understands the language of animals, although the latter are not biologically capable of communicating with humans. It seems then that the meaning of writing for Zola is to give a

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<sup>3</sup> Emile Zola, “L’amour des bêtes,” *Nouvelle campagne* (Paris, 1897) 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> Zola, *Amour* 88.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Prometheus, 1998) 88.

voice to the voiceless. However, this traps Zola in charity towards the disinherited. I will show later that the human depicted as animal does not acquire subjectivity so easily in Zola's world.

In "L'amour des bêtes," the author notices that his concern for animals originates from feelings of love rather than of compassion:

Mais cette charité n'est que de la pitié, et comment expliquer l'amour? La question reste entière, pourquoi la bête en santé, la bête qui n'a pas besoin de moi, demeure-t-elle à ce point mon amie, ma sœur, une compagne que je recherche, que j'aime ? Pourquoi cette affection chez moi, et pourquoi chez d'autres l'indifférence et même la haine ?<sup>6</sup>

Zola stresses the fact that this feeling of love has contradictory characteristics and remains inexplicable:

On aime les bêtes, enfin, et c'est l'amour encore, un autre amour qui a ses conditions, ses nécessités, ses douleurs et ses joies. [. . .] Il est, ainsi que tous les grands sentiments, ridicule et délicieux, plein de démente et de douceur, capable d'extravagances véritables, aussi bien que des plus sages, des plus solides volontés.<sup>7</sup>

In his conclusion to this article, the author reveals his secret dream: he strongly desires that beasts have their own nation and that humans would thus show more respect towards animals. This could improve mankind as a whole: "De cet amour universel des bêtes, par-dessus les

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<sup>6</sup> Zola, *Amour* 89.

<sup>7</sup> Zola, *Amour* 88.

frontières, peut-être en arriverait-on à l'universel amour des hommes.”<sup>8</sup> Zola uses a similar utopian approach in his collection of short stories entitled *Contes à Ninon* published in 1864. These tales are not realistic and are addressed to Ninon, a young woman Zola loved when he was seventeen. He used to tell her stories with the magic of Provence in the background. It is in the eighth chapter entitled “L’aimable Primevère, reine du royaume des Heureux” of the tale “Aventure du grand Sidoine et du petit Médéric” that Zola depicts a compassionate feeling toward animals in his main character. The kingdom of the happy is located in an unknown part of the world. Primevère becomes queen of the area when she is twelve. Since her nation enjoys full felicity, Primevère decides to look for existences to help and to comfort. She has the need to do good and presents her new religion: “celle qui apprend à tendre la main, dans la création, aux êtres les plus déshérités. Elle disait souvent qu’elle avait eu jadis de grandes pitiés, en songeant aux bêtes privées de la parole, ne pouvant ainsi nous témoigner leurs besoins.”<sup>9</sup> Zola applies his inner thoughts to his character: Primevère has the urge to help weaker creatures than herself, such as animals but also the blind and the dumb. In this utopian kingdom of the happy, the author goes even farther: Primevère is able to understand the animals’ language because of the love she gives to them. After hearing with astonishment of the never-ending battle of life in Nature, Primevère creates a huge shed where every animal could find refuge. She visits them twice a day and she feeds them the same type of food regardless of their species: “Son but était de les confondre peu à peu en un même peuple; elle espérait faire perdre à chaque espèce sa langue et ses habitudes, les conduire toutes insensiblement à une unité universelle, en brouillant pour elles,

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<sup>8</sup> Zola, *Amour* 96.

<sup>9</sup> Emile Zola, *Contes à Ninon* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1955) 231.

par un continuel contact, leurs diverses façons de voir et d'entendre."<sup>10</sup> As in a utopian world, she wants to eradicate the notion of species and of power differences between animals to make humans get closer to the entire animal world.

In 1932, Denise Le Blond-Zola wrote an article entitled "Emile Zola et l'amour des bêtes," in which she depicts her father's relation to animals in his own life and in his work. This piece of writing is of crucial importance to show the important role the animal played in Zola's life. Le Blond-Zola starts by describing animals surrounding Zola. Already when he was young, the author always had a dog or a cat: "on trouve à ses côtés le chien fidèle, dont le nom et la race varient, mais toujours passionnément aimé, avec une sorte de pitié pour le compagnon sans parole qui ne pouvait exprimer ses désirs, ses joies et ses peines."<sup>11</sup> In the countryside of Médan, Zola's home looked more like a farm than like a house. He had animals in the farmyard, the cowshed and the stable: this caused such a proliferation of animals that Le Blond-Zola compares it to Désirée's farmyard. Zola was thus always surrounded by an enormous variety of animals, such as birds, cows, rabbits, cats, dogs and horses. Zola's estate in Médan also consisted of an island on the Seine, which was facing his house. It is well worth noting that there was a cemetery on this island to bury animals who died. Both Fanfan and Pinpin, two dogs Zola loved tremendously and pictured in his writing, rest peacefully on this island. The existence of this cemetery emphasizes Zola's urge to treat animals as humans: both deserve proper burials. Le Blond-Zola also claims that her father pitied the animals in cages in the *Jardin des plantes*. She

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<sup>10</sup> Zola, *Contes* 236.

<sup>11</sup> Denise Le Blond-Zola, "Emile Zola et l'amour des bêtes," *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 6 (1956): 285.

describes Zola as “un observateur scrupuleux de l’être humain et des humbles animaux, toujours prêt à élever sa voix puissante en faveur des petits et des souffrants.”<sup>12</sup>

Zola also wrote two short stories specifically on cats: “Les chattes” and “Le paradis des chats.” In both tales, cats are personified and become humans. In “Les chattes,” Zola presents portraits of his two female cats Françoise and Catherine, who are depicted as beautiful women:

Françoise a la tête ronde et rieuse d’une fille d’Europe. Ses grands yeux d’un vert pâle tiennent tout son visage. Son nez et ses lèvres roses sont enduits de carmin. On la dirait peinte comme une vierge folle de son corps. Elle est grasse, potelée, Parisienne jusqu’au bout des griffes. Elle s’affiche en marchant, prenant des airs engageants, retroussant la queue avec le frémissent brusque d’une petite dame qui relève la traîne de sa robe.

Catherine a la tête pointue et fine d’une déesse égyptienne. Ses yeux, jaunes comme des lunes d’or, ont la fixité, la dureté impénétrable des prunelles d’une idole barbare. Aux coins de ses lèvres minces, rit l’éternelle ironie silencieuse des sphinx. Quand elle s’accroupit sur ses pattes de derrière, la tête haute et immobile, elle est une divinité de marbre noir, la grande Pacht hiératique des temples de Thèbes.<sup>13</sup>

Françoise’s femininity is inherent in her animality and emphasized by the play on the word *chatte*: this term also refers to the female sex in French. Catherine as a sphinx is a divine but mysterious being who is also both human and animal.

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<sup>12</sup> Le Blond-Zola 293.

<sup>13</sup> Emile Zola, “Les chattes,” *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 9 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-70) 420.



In the tale “Le paradis des chats,” the narrator listens to his cat whom he received from his aunt and whom he considers stupid. This angora cat has a voice and tells the narrator about his desires of freedom while he was living under close scrutiny. This cat is convinced that he would be happier living on roofs than with his mistress. One day he finds his way to the roof from the kitchen window and has the experience of a lifetime. He finds it extremely difficult to survive because food is not easily available. When he starts regretting his life with his mistress, he comes back home and is beaten by her. He concludes that “le véritable bonheur, le paradis, mon cher maître, c’est d’être enfermé et battu dans une pièce où il y a de la viande. Je parle pour les chats.”<sup>14</sup> It is now clear that Zola loves cats, especially Françoise and Catherine, his humanized and deified *chattes*. In a letter to Champfleury in 1868, he writes that “J’adore les chats, j’en ai toujours quatre ou cinq autour de moi.”<sup>15</sup> Zola was also a member of a jury in a feline competition. In her article, Le Blond-Zola quotes her father: “J’adore les chats, les seuls animaux domestiques qui ne soient pas des esclaves, qui aient accepté la société des hommes en gardant leur personnalité.”<sup>16</sup> In an interview entitled “Enquête sur les chats,”<sup>17</sup> he announces that he loves cats dearly, especially because their personality is troubling and indefinable.

“Enfin couronné” is an article Zola wrote for the *Figaro* of May 30, 1896, in which he discusses his relations with animals and his participation in the award ceremony of *la Société Protectrice des Animaux*. First of all, Zola tells us that his article “L’amour des bêtes” has moved

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<sup>14</sup> Emile Zola, “Le paradis des chats,” *Contes à Ninon et nouveaux contes à Ninon* (Paris: Bernouard, 1927) 339.

<sup>15</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.2.163.

<sup>16</sup> Le Blond-Zola 291.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy E. Speirs, and Dolorès A. Signori, *Entretiens avec Zola* (Ottawa: Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1990) 173-74.

the *Figaro* readers to such a point that female readers, in their letters to the author, changed their opinion and viewed him as “un brave homme” now that he loves animals:

Et c’est très vrai, cela, on ne savait pas que j’aimais les bêtes. [...] [A]près avoir dans plus de vingt volumes parlé des bêtes avec une tendresse fraternelle, mis des bêtes en scène ainsi que des soeurs préférées, donné à la bête la place la plus large à côté de l’homme, on voit les gens s’étonner et se récrier, parce qu’ils apprennent tout d’un coup que vous les aimez!<sup>18</sup>

In his novels and tales, Zola always emphasizes the proximity between humans and animals. He believes that both humans and animals should have the same social agenda: “la cause des bêtes pour moi est plus haute, intimement liée à la cause des hommes, à ce point que toute amélioration dans nos rapports avec l’animalité doit marquer à coup sûr un progrès dans le bonheur humain.”<sup>19</sup> He also gives special thanks to all the animals he created in his work, which are symbolized by the ark:

Merci donc, chères bêtes de mon coeur et de mon imagination, vous toutes dont j’ai peuplé mes livres. Vous êtes de ma famille, je vous revois galopant à la suite des mille créatures humaines que j’ai mises au monde, et cela me fait plaisir, et je suis content de vous avoir réservé votre place dans l’arche immense.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Emile Zola, “Enfin Couronné,” *Nouvelle campagne* (Paris, 1897) 124.

<sup>19</sup> Zola, *Couronné* 125.

<sup>20</sup> Zola, *Couronné* 127.

### 3.2. Albine and Désirée's Animal Sides and Subjectivity in Badiou's and Deleuze's Terms

One can construe Alain Badiou's position in *Ethics: an Understanding of Evil* as dividing the field of ethics on two levels, that of animal rights and that of human rights. Badiou criticizes the former, the ethics of evil, which reduces the human to its mere animality, as insufficient without its relation to the latter, the ethics of truth which describes man's relation to his subjectivity. He rejects the traditional meaning of the term 'ethics:' "Rather than reduce it to an aspect of pity for victims, it should become the enduring maxim of *singular processes*. Rather than make it merely the province of conservatism with a good conscience, it should concern the destiny of *truths*."<sup>21</sup> Badiou also claims that "There is no ethics in general. There are only – eventually – ethics of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation."<sup>22</sup>

More precisely, Badiou denounces the shortcomings of the ethics of human rights, because it leads to human rights being conceived in negative terms. He disagrees with the simple assimilation of the human to the animal, which renders man "a simple mortal animal,"<sup>23</sup> for the following three reasons. First of all, man should have more value than a simple mortal animal and should be considered an immortal being rather than a victimized mortal animal. Secondly, the ethics of human rights wrongly assumes that "Every collective will to the Good creates Evil."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, evil occurs as an effect of the good, as a consequence of an action motivated by the good, and because truth exists. The ethics of human rights tends to make us suspicious

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001) 3.

<sup>22</sup> Badiou 16.

<sup>23</sup> Badiou 16.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou 13.

toward any revolutionary claim toward social justice as a potential threat of a drift toward totalitarianism. Finally, “thanks to its negative and a priori determination of Evil, ethics prevents itself from thinking the singularity of situations as such, which is the obligatory starting point of all properly human action.”<sup>25</sup> Situations involving evil should be analyzed on a singular rather than on a general basis: each one of them has its own remedy and its own ethics.

Badiou proposes the notion of “ethics of truths” as the second level of a consistent ethical theory. He does not find much relevance in the ethics of difference and in the notion of the Other recognized by racism, sexism and multiculturalism: “since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet, so differences are then precisely what truths depose, or render insignificant,”<sup>26</sup> and he gives the following principle with regards to truth and to difference: “Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*”<sup>27</sup> and “a truth is *the same for all*.”<sup>28</sup> His ethics of truth thus only occurs in the context of a recognition of the same: it is part of a project to reconstruct a form of radical universalism. Moreover, Badiou distinguishes between four types of truth: of science, of love, of politics and of art. The term ‘ethics’ as such does not exist: one should speak of “ethic-of” (of science, of love, of politics, of art), and the “only genuine ethics is of truths [. . .] the only ethics is of processes of truth.”<sup>29</sup> These four kinds of ethics are also related to four definite subjective types (the scientific, the amorous, the political and the artistic), which define a human subject taking part in a process of truth. Man

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<sup>25</sup> Badiou 14.

<sup>26</sup> Badiou 27.

<sup>27</sup> Badiou 27.

<sup>28</sup> Badiou 27.

<sup>29</sup> Badiou 28.

becomes subject only by working on a truth: the subject consequently bears a process of truth or the subject is induced by a process of truth. Furthermore, a truth-process has three major dimensions: the event, which consists of something else than opinions and knowledge, but is unpredictable and can never be reduced to mere situations;<sup>30</sup> the fidelity, which implies an examination of the situation from the perspective of the event; and the truth which is produced by the fidelity. Truth thus becomes “the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation.”<sup>31</sup> The truth-process also entails a leap of faith over an inescapable incertitude beyond what one can know of the situation, which is the fidelity to something one needs to believe but which cannot be proven. Finally, the individual enters into the composition of his subject; the composition exceeds him and it is by this excess that he becomes Immortal:

The ‘some-one’ thus caught up in what attests that he belongs to the truth-process as one of its foundation-points is simultaneously *himself*, nothing other than himself, a multiple singularity recognizable among all others, and *in excess of himself*, because the uncertain course [...] of fidelity *passes through him*, transfixes his singular body and inscribes him, from within time, in an instant of eternity.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Badiou explains the notion of situation in the preface to the English edition: “The concept of situation is especially important, since I maintain that there can be no ethics in general, but only an ethic of singular truths, and thus an ethic relative to a particular situation. [...] This means that a situation must be conceived as both, in its *being*, a pure multiple [...] and, in its *appearing*, as the effect of a transcendental legislation” (lvi).

<sup>31</sup> Badiou 42.

<sup>32</sup> Badiou 45.

While opinion, being “beneath the true and the false,”<sup>33</sup> is always communicable, the result of the truth-process cannot be communicated.

With regards to the human and the animal, Badiou admits his admiration for Darwin in an interview<sup>34</sup> and recognizes close ties between the human and the animal: “I think that human beings are animals, animals which have at their disposal a singular ability, a singular, aleatory, and partial ability, which identifies them philosophically as human, within the animal sphere. The animal sphere is itself internal to the material sphere.”<sup>35</sup> Badiou might agree with the fact that unnecessary sufferings should be prevented for all animals, including human beings; but he stresses the fact that human rights go beyond this mere negative and reactive definition: they can be properly conceived within the perspective of a positive yet dangerous construction of truth and meaning. Badiou’s perspective on humanity and subjectivity, as not being shared with the animal world, seems particularly relevant in *La faute de l’abbé Mouret*, since the two characters Désirée and Albine represent the ambiguity of the human-animal border in Zola.

In Zola’s *La faute de l’abbé Mouret*, Désirée is the animal lover who finishes by being so affected by her environment that she transforms herself mentally into an animal. In *La conquête de Plassans*, her mother describes her as follows: “elle n’a pas la tête forte, elle est restée petite fille... C’est une innocente... Nous ne la tourmentons pas pour apprendre. Elle a quatorze ans, et elle ne sait encore qu’aimer les bêtes.”<sup>36</sup> Her mother, though, is disgusted by her daughter’s

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<sup>33</sup> Badiou 51.

<sup>34</sup> Badiou 132.

<sup>35</sup> Badiou 132.

<sup>36</sup> Emile Zola, *La conquête de Plassans* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990) 37.

appearance: she wears dirty and torn clothes and she has a strong earthy smell. In *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*, Désirée is now twenty-two years old but she still has a childish air and is not more than ten mentally. She lives with her brother in his presbytery in the Artaud village after the death of her parents. Désirée's life in communion with animals is described as follows:

Désirée avait alors vingt-deux ans. Grandie à la campagne, chez sa nourrice, une paysanne de Saint-Eutrope, elle avait poussé en plein fumier. Le cerveau vide, sans pensées graves d'aucune sorte, elle profitait du sol gras, du plein air de la campagne, se développant toute en chair, devenant une belle bête, fraîche, blanche, au sang rose, à la peau ferme. C'était comme une ânesse de race qui aurait eu le don du rire. Bien que pataugeant du matin au soir, elle gardait ses attaches fines, les lignes souples de ses reins, l'affinement bourgeois de son corps de vierge ; si bien qu'elle était une créature à part, ni demoiselle, ni paysanne, une fille nourrie de la terre, avec une ampleur d'épaules et un front borné de jeune déesse. Sans doute, ce fut sa pauvreté d'esprit qui la rapprocha des animaux. Elle n'était à l'aise qu'en leur compagnie, entendait mieux leur langage que celui des hommes, les soignait avec des attendrissements maternels.<sup>37</sup>

Désirée is the mistress of her farmyard and due to her animal instincts she fully understands her animals' needs. She is clearly a strange creature, distancing herself from the human. Désirée is also represented as a purebred donkey, an animal of distinction. Docteur Pascal calls her "la grande bête"<sup>38</sup> and finds her extremely healthy. In *Le roman scientifique*

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<sup>37</sup> Emile Zola, *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) 87-88.

<sup>38</sup> Zola, *Faute* 323.

*d'Emile Zola : la médecine et les Rougon-Macquart*, Henri Martineau gives more precise information on Désirée's psychiatric status: "Ce n'est point une idiote, elle n'en a ni la petite taille, ni les traits inharmonieux, ni l'aspect extérieur, laid, grimaçant et ridé. Elle ressemble plutôt à l'imbécile, dont la santé est souvent bonne, la taille normale et la physionomie régulière."<sup>39</sup> Quoting the medical authority of Valentin Magnan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Martineau states that an exaggerated love for animals is usual in people suffering from hereditary disorders. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault argues that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the birth of the asylum and of psychoanalysis, the madman is represented as an animal. At that time, the madman is not considered to be a sick person. It is only in the nineteenth century that the presence of animality in a madman is perceived as a symptom of a psychiatric disease. The notion of animality also changes its connotation in the nineteenth century: it moves from the negativity of the anti-natural as animal to a positive form of man evolving naturally from the animal.<sup>40</sup> In "Types de la femme contemporaine en France: la paysanne,"<sup>41</sup> Zola emphasizes how much influence the animal environment has on a woman. For instance, female farmers become simple-minded and return to animal life. They also work like animals on the farm and end up being their husbands' cows. Just as in the case of Désirée, young girls are taught everything they need to know concerning natural cycles by the animals living close to them. When they become women and full-time farmers, they are like draft animals, a situation which also affects their intellectual powers: "c'est que le poids du labeur n'a pas seulement dénaturé son corps [de la

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<sup>39</sup> Henri Martineau, *Le roman scientifique d'Emile Zola: la médecine et les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: Baillière, 1907) 114.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) 72-82.

<sup>41</sup> P.A Duncan and V. Erdely, *Emile Zola: lettres de Paris* (Genève: Droz & Minard, 1963).



femme], il s'est attaqué aussi à ses facultés intellectuelles, elle s'abrutit et retourne à la vie animale."<sup>42</sup> Thus Zola makes a paradoxical distinction in his description of the effects of hard work on female farmers: women's bodies become unnatural while their intellectual faculties are close to those of animals. In the case of Désirée, her lack of intellect is a defect she inherited from her parents rather than a consequence of hard work in the country. Yet it is still striking that Zola links limited mental capacity to animals: the term *bête* is thus used in its two meanings. In his preface to his collection of essays entitled *Mes haines*, Zola again makes an analogy between the words *bête/animal* and *bêtise*, comparing foolish people to animals who are devoid of intelligence. For instance, he states that he hates powerless and useless people: "Je ne sais rien de plus irritant que ces brutes qui se dandinent sur leurs deux pieds, comme des oies, avec leurs yeux ronds et leur bouche béante."<sup>43</sup> It is interesting that he makes a distinction between foolish and crazy people: the former are purely useless while the latter could think and have "dans le chaos de leurs pensées [...] une vérité suprême."<sup>44</sup>

Désirée is not only described as mentally challenged but also as sexually challenged: puberty has not concerned her and she has absolutely no ordinary physical desires. She seems to be sexually satisfied by watching her animals reproducing:

Elle trouva une satisfaction continue à sentir autour d'elle un pullulement. Des tas de fumier, des bêtes accouplées, se dégageait un flot de génération, au milieu duquel elle goûtait les joies de la fécondité. Quelque chose d'elle se contentait

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<sup>42</sup> Duncan and Erdely 99.

<sup>43</sup> Emile Zola, *Mes haines* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1928) 7.

<sup>44</sup> Zola, *Haines* 8.

dans la ponte des poules; elle portait ses lapines au mâle, avec des rires de belle fille calmée; elle éprouvait des bonheurs de femme grosse à traire sa chèvre.<sup>45</sup>

Her proximity with animals fertilizing each other is equivalent to her own insemination. She is described as Cybèle, the goddess of fertility, and she becomes “la mère commune, la mère naturelle”<sup>46</sup> to the numerous members of her farmyard comprising rabbits, hens, ducks, turkeys, geese, a goat, a cow, a pig called Mathieu, and even a cock named Alexandre. It is in a fantastic picture surrounded by her animals that she becomes the closest to the animal and has an orgasm:

Les bêtes avaient fini par monter sur elle. C’était un flot de plumes vivantes qui la couvrait. Des poules semblaient couvrir à ses pieds. Les oies mettaient le duvet de leur cou le long de ses cuisses. A gauche, le cochon lui chauffait le flanc, pendant que la chèvre, à droite, allongeait sa tête barbue jusque sous son aisselle. Un peu partout, des pigeons nichaient, dans ses mains ouvertes, au creux de sa taille, derrière ses épaules tombantes. Et elle était toute rose, en dormant, caressée par le souffle plus fort de la vache, étouffée sous le poids du grand coq accroupi, qui était descendu plus bas que la gorge, les ailes battantes, la crête allumée, et dont le ventre fauve la brûlait d’une caresse de flamme à travers ses jupes.<sup>47</sup>

In this scene, the cock is the one who gives the most sexual pleasure to Désirée and who takes the traditional role of a man. Alexandre the cock is humanized in this scene, while Désirée is

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<sup>45</sup> Zola, *Faute* 89.

<sup>46</sup> Zola, *Faute* 89.

<sup>47</sup> Zola, *Faute* 333.

animalized and feels purely animal blossoming. She looks like a bird: she is covered with feathers from hens and pigeons and with goose down. This is clearly a passage in which Zola plays on the human-animal barrier.

Désirée is also fascinated by her cow Lise coupling with a bull and by her delivering a calf. In Zola's *La terre*, Lise is not a cow but the name of a female peasant who moves to the animal in a specific scene. It is interesting that she gives birth at the same time as the cow la Coliche does. Both have problems delivering, but Lise's husband thinks that a veterinarian is needed to help La Coliche while spending money on a doctor for his wife is not deemed necessary. Lise's labor is thus compared to calving, which seems to blur the delimitations between the human and the animal: "c'était dit, que toutes les deux vèleraient ensemble."<sup>48</sup> Lise seems to receive some cow particles that makes her child similar to a calf, but she does not become-cow: her child's first cries are those of a cat, the baby is said to mew. This simultaneous delivery in *La terre* brings humanity and animality together and symbolizes immortal life. In his article "Enfin couronné," Zola has a special word for la Coliche: "[merci] à ma vache la Coliche, dont j'ai voulu que les couches fussent le symbole de la vie immortelle, coulant de l'animalité et de l'humanité, éternellement."<sup>49</sup>

In *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*, Albine is another female character. She grows up like an animal running on all fours in Le Paradou, which is a heavenly, enormous garden containing thousands of different plants and which surrounds the house in which she lives with her anticlerical uncle. After a cerebral fever strikes the priest Serge, his uncle urges him to recover under Albine's care and away from the presbytery. Serge is seduced by this mysterious and

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<sup>48</sup> Emile Zola, *La terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) 282.

<sup>49</sup> Zola, *Couronné* 128.

troubling being that is Albine. As in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, Albine becomes the temptress that makes the priest fall and break his vows. It is actually the garden that makes them do the forbidden: an atmosphere of animal and vegetal heat surrounds them and tempts them to sex. As Serge puts it, “Tes [d’Albine] arbres distillent un poison qui change les hommes en bêtes.”<sup>50</sup> Albine is often compared to the animal especially for her agility: she has “un bond de chèvre”<sup>51</sup> and she climbs fearlessly in trees like a squirrel. Yet it is the snake she really embodies: Serge feels that her skirt follows him like a “frôlement de couleuvre,”<sup>52</sup> and Frère Archangias, who discovers the forbidden relationship, sees a snake’s tail in her hair. Before committing suicide when pregnant by Serge, Albine is said to be wandering in Le Paradou “traînant l’agonie muette d’une bête blessée.”<sup>53</sup> She is really like an animal one can only feel pity for: she cannot express her sorrow, and she is waiting for death since “Après l’amour, il n’y avait plus que la mort.”<sup>54</sup>

On the whole, Albine and Désirée both live in a very animal world. The question is whether their positions on the human-animal border make them become-animals in the Deleuzian sense. In an essay entitled “Literature and Life,” Deleuze claims that “Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable,

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<sup>50</sup> Zola, *Faute* 348.

<sup>51</sup> Zola, *Faute* 78.

<sup>52</sup> Zola, *Faute* 229.

<sup>53</sup> Zola, *Faute* 394.

<sup>54</sup> Zola, *Faute* 395.

becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible.”<sup>55</sup> One wonders then if Zola endures such a transformational process while writing. I believe that Albine and Désirée are two different cases as far as becoming is concerned. I think that Albine’s sad end in death cannot be explained by Deleuze and Guattari’s theories. It is clear that she forms a forbidden desiring-machine with Serge, which finally leads her to death. Although the breakdown of the desiring-machine is totally predictable, connecting to a desiring-machine does not lead to death. The death instinct is not to have such a powerful role in Albine’s life. Albine is clearly the subject whose body traps her in sex and makes her return to the animal and the savage world. She is a victim of the ethics of evil: she is considered the victim of a forbidden love relationship, and she is depicted as an object of pity the reader cannot but feel sorry for. She is clearly ensnared in the dichotomy of the subject/object, a conception refuted by Deleuze and Guattari, since she does not escape subjectivity and does not reach any kind of liberation.

On the other hand, Désirée does not desire in the same way as Albine: the fact that she prefers non-human objects of love makes a remarkable difference. Désirée is mentally challenged and thus leads an animal life. She clearly becomes-woman in the form of the maternal figure in the farmyard, and she embodies the goddess Cybèle. Moreover, Désirée is a woman whose body is without organs: she does not have sexual needs and is not attracted to humans. She makes a symbiosis with the animals of her farmyard, an alliance which has a liberating effect on her mental status. She seems to escape reality and to find happiness in a world similar to a golden age. By proximity to the animal, Désirée acquires elements from the animal. Her becoming-animal occurs with a freeing of animal molecules, which are transmitted to similar molecules on the animal selected. For instance, she becomes-goat when she drinks milk from her

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<sup>55</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 1.

goat's udders, she becomes-cow as "la tranquille soeur de la grande vache blanche et rousse"<sup>56</sup> and she becomes-bird in the animalistic orgasm scene. She does not simply imitate the animal: animal molecules are so closely reterritorialized on her that she cannot be distinguished from them. Her becoming implies a process of desire: she is happiest when her animals couple, and as the goddess of fertility she seems to empower them. According to Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, Désirée does not possess typical human features such as a conscience and the comprehension of the meaning of sin: "si Désirée a accompli le miracle de la fertilité sans la sexualité, c'est au prix de son humanité."<sup>57</sup> Although Désirée is an imbecile, Bertrand-Jennings believes that Zola depicts her positively in her atypical mode of life: "Désirée et sa vache, symboles de fécondité, mais aussi de lourde et stupide matérialité, sont-elles chargées de figurer à la fois le triomphe de la vie sur la mort et l'abdication de la conscience et de l'intelligence humaines."<sup>58</sup> At the end of the cycle of the Rougon-Macquart, Désirée is still alive and her transformation into the animal does not lead her to death as is usually the outcome in Zola's plots.

As mentioned above in the discussion of *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou disputes an ethics solely based on pity. In the eighteenth-century pity became the "mainspring of the relation with the other,"<sup>59</sup> and it is namely in this type of relation that Zola engages with some of his human characters, such as Albine, bordering on the animal. Indeed, for Zola, whether man is responsible for his actions or not, he is still to be pitied and to be felt sorry

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<sup>56</sup> Zola, *Faute* 333.

<sup>57</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L'éros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 106.

<sup>58</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Zola ou l'envers de la science: de *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* au *Docteur Pascal*," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 9.1-2 (1980-81): 102.

<sup>59</sup> Badiou 9.

for. Badiou explicitly argues against the simple agreement with a conception of man defined negatively as a victim and as an animal:

[B]ecause the status of victim, of suffering beast, of emaciated, dying body, equates man with his animal substructure, it reduces him to the level of a living organism pure and simple. [...] To be sure, humanity is an animal species. It is moral and predatory. But neither of these attributes can distinguish humanity within the world of the living. In his role as executioner, man is an animal abjection, but we must have the courage to add that in his role as victim, he is generally worth little more.<sup>60</sup>

As a matter of fact, man should be viewed as more than as a “being-for-death:” he has rights in an affirmative perspective of the Immortal. It is also in being Immortal that the human becomes subject: “subjectivation is immortal and makes Man. Beyond this there is only a biological species, a ‘biped without feathers’, whose charms are not obvious.”<sup>61</sup> Zola’s characters usually die due to the animal side arising in their body: this is where Zola, in relation to his animalized characters, mostly agrees with Badiou because he shows that “the only thing that can really happen to someone is death.”<sup>62</sup> It is clear from the passages quoted above that Zola reveals some charity toward the disinherited and suffering fraternity in his ethics of animal rights. Yet, believing that Zola simply pities animals and weaker creatures is a little hasty. Zola’s concern originates from a strong feeling of love, which is not surprising in such an animal lover.

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<sup>60</sup> Badiou 11.

<sup>61</sup> Badiou 12.

<sup>62</sup> Badiou 35.

Nevertheless, this feeling of love remains mysterious: Zola himself has trouble explaining it, since such a truth is not communicable. Zola agrees with Badiou to a certain extent: he recognizes the ethics of truth and does not limit himself to the ethics of evil. In *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*, human characters depicted as animals, such as Albine and Désirée, illustrate the ethics of evil and the ethics of love respectively. Like Zola, Désirée and Primevère are fond of animals. The three of them seem to illustrate Badiou's amorous modality of subjectivity. Yet Badiou does not involve the animal in the ethics of truth, since animals do not have the ability to love and cannot acquire subjectivity. While Zola blurs the human-animal border in animalizing characters that command love, Badiou excludes this type of lover from his ethics of truth.

### **3.3. Emile as Political Subject in the Dreyfus Affair**

In the above discussion of the human-animal border, Zola in showing his love for animals seems to claim "Désirée, c'est moi." However, Désirée is a positive subject who is not given political subjectivity by Zola, mainly because she is mentally challenged. Thus Désirée does not fully represent Zola: she is only an excellent illustration of his love for animals. Zola reaffirms his political subjectivity in his involvement in the Dreyfus affair.

It was on October 15, 1894 that Alfred Dreyfus was arrested. Two months later, he was sentenced to deportation and to military degradation. On January 13, 1898, Zola published his famous "J'accuse" in *L'Aurore*. In July of the same year, Zola was sentenced to one year in prison and to a fine of three thousand francs. Shortly after hearing this news, he left France for England so that the sentence could not be served on him. On June 3, 1899, the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the verdict of 1894 and ruled that Dreyfus was to appear before another court martial. At the end of this second trial, Dreyfus was found guilty but with extenuating



circumstances. Ten days later, he was pardoned by Emile Loubet, France's president. It was only in 1906, four years after Zola's death, that the Court revoked the previous verdict and passed a law to reinstate Dreyfus. In the same year, Zola's ashes were transferred to the Pantheon and Dreyfus was named *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*. As a matter of fact, Zola died without being fully aware of the extraordinary influence he had on the Dreyfus affair.

The most frequent metaphor Zola uses to emphasize the gravity of this political situation is medical: "La plaie ne fera que s'élargir et s'envenimer, si on ne se décide pas à la cicatriser tout de suite par un acte de justice."<sup>63</sup> France is suffering from cancer, from oppression against free speech and against individual freedom. Zola fears for France's human rights and thinks that the health of the country needs to be restored. In "J'accuse," the famous letter addressed to Félix Faure, President of the Republic, Zola starts by refusing to keep silent and to act in collusion with criminals:

La vérité, je la dirai, car j'ai promis de la dire, si la justice, régulièrement saisie, ne la faisait pas, pleine et entière. Mon devoir est de parler, je ne veux pas être complice. Mes nuits seraient hantées par le spectre de l'innocent qui expie là-bas, dans la plus affreuse des tortures, un crime qu'il n'a pas commis.<sup>64</sup>

Zola is very direct and gives a specific list of people he accuses of wrongdoing and of crime. He acknowledges the revolutionary cast of this letter but for good reasons: "l'acte que j'accomplis ici n'est qu'un moyen révolutionnaire pour hâter l'explosion de la vérité et de la justice. J'ai qu'une passion, celle de la lumière, au nom de l'humanité qui a tant souffert et qui a droit au

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<sup>63</sup> Philippe Oriol, «*J'accuse!*» *Emile Zola et l'affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: EJL, 1998) 33.

<sup>64</sup> Oriol 64-65.

bonheur.”<sup>65</sup> Light, symbolizing truth and justice, indicates a necessary enlightenment of humankind, which is darkened by error and ignorance.

Zola views his enemies in the Dreyfus affair negatively: “C’est, en vérité, que le spectacle a été inouï, dépassant en brutalité, en effronterie, en ignoble aveu tout ce que la bête humaine a jamais confessé de plus instinctif et de plus bas.”<sup>66</sup> In comparing his adversaries to instinctive brutes, Zola puts their political subjectivity into doubt. In the article entitled “Justice,” Zola claims to feel a lot of pity for the silly people who think that he left France to have a good time abroad and to avoid going to prison. In a letter to Mr Brisson, president of the Cabinet, Zola notices a return to savage times: “Ne dites-vous pas avec moi que des cannibales seuls ont des mœurs pareilles et que nous voilà tombés dans le mépris et dans le dégoût de l’univers?”<sup>67</sup> In using a cannibalism metaphor, Zola sees captain Dreyfus as a piece of meat on the point of being wolfed down by his fellow men. This metaphor expressing a human perversion is a way for Zola to abase his enemies.

Zola reaffirms his political subjectivity when he involves himself in the Dreyfus Affair. Indeed he takes an extremely active role in order to make known the truth. Truth itself is a crucial term for Zola: “je n’ai jamais eu qu’une passion dans ma vie, la vérité”<sup>68</sup> and his motto in his articles on the Dreyfus affair is “la vérité est en marche, et rien ne l’arrêtera.”<sup>69</sup> Le Blond-Zola also emphasizes the importance of the term ‘truth:’ “Tel était l’idéal de Zola, tel fut le but

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<sup>65</sup> Oriol 76.

<sup>66</sup> Oriol 38.

<sup>67</sup> Alain Pagès, ed., *L’affaire Dreyfus: lettres et entretiens inédits* (Paris: CNRS, 1994) 84.

<sup>68</sup> Oriol 56.

<sup>69</sup> Oriol 25.

de sa vie: la vérité en littérature, la vérité humaine, toute la Vérité.”<sup>70</sup> Zola gets involved in the Dreyfus affair because he feels the urge to react against iniquity. As he is always writing for good causes and to improve the human race, the Dreyfus affair is the opportunity for him to fight for an ideal of justice and for truth. Injustice is a consequence of untruth; Zola stresses the importance of the reciprocal relation between truth and justice. In *L’Aurore* of 5 June, 1899, Zola published an article entitled “Justice,” in which he stresses the notion of truth: “Je suis un libre écrivain qui n’a eu qu’une passion dans sa vie, celle de la vérité, qui s’est battu pour elle sur tous les champs de bataille. Depuis quarante ans bientôt, j’ai servi mon pays par la plume, de tout mon courage, de toute ma force de travail et de bonne foi.”<sup>71</sup> In his fight against the fabrication of Dreyfus’ guilt, Zola asks for a revision of this erroneous sentence given to Dreyfus and this for France’s sake. In fact, his motivation is to eradicate evil and untruth which is the contaminated part of truth: “The ethics of truths [...] is also that which tries to ward off Evil, through its effective and tenacious inclusion in the process of a truth.”<sup>72</sup>

In a 1899 letter to captain Dreyfus, Zola writes about the pity he feels for his suffering: “Mon coeur déborde, et je ne puis que vous envoyer toute ma fraternité pour ce que vous avez souffert, pour ce qu’a souffert votre vaillante femme.”<sup>73</sup> Zola was active in the Dreyfus affair mainly because of the commiseration he felt for the Dreyfus family. Truth was thus not the only rationale for his fight. In a letter to the captain’s wife, he gives the motives for his active involvement in the Dreyfus affair:

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<sup>70</sup> Denise Le Blond-Zola, *Emile Zola raconté par sa fille* (Paris: Grasset, 2000) 280.

<sup>71</sup> Emile Zola, “Justice,” *L’affaire Dreyfus: la vérité en marche*, ed. Colette Becker (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969) 149.

<sup>72</sup> Badiou 91.

<sup>73</sup> Pagès 161.

Quant à moi, je le confesse, mon oeuvre n'a d'abord été qu'une oeuvre de solidarité humaine, de pitié et d'amour. Un innocent souffrait le plus effroyable des supplices, je n'ai vu que cela, je ne me suis mis en campagne que pour le délivrer de ses maux. Dès que son innocence me fut prouvée, il y eut en moi une hantise affreuse, cette pensée de tout ce que le misérable avait souffert, de tout ce qu'il souffrait encore dans le cachot muré où il agonisait, sous la fatalité monstrueuse dont il ne pouvait même déchiffrer l'énigme. Quelle tempête sous ce crâne, quelle attente dévorante, ramenée par chaque aurore! Et je n'ai plus vécu, et mon courage n'a été fait que de ma pitié, et mon but unique a été de mettre fin à la torture, de soulever la pierre pour que le supplicié revînt à la clarté du jour, fût rendu aux siens, qui panseraient ses plaies.<sup>74</sup>

This passage is crucial in discussing Zola's reactions to the suffering and the weak. Captain Dreyfus is seen both as an object of pity and as an object of love; I would argue that Zola's actual love is here for truth. In exhibiting his feelings of pity and of love for captain Dreyfus, Zola engages in an ethics of evil as well as in an ethics of love, two crucial elements of a true ethical system.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

It has been shown that Zola can view the human animal as more than a pure object of pity in the example of Désirée. For instance, Albine is a simple object of pity: she does not acquire any of

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<sup>74</sup> Pagès 170-71.

the four types of subjectivity proposed by Badiou. Albine also does not go beyond human subjectivity since she does not become-animal in the Deleuzian sense. On the other hand, Désirée is not seen as an object of pity according to Badiou's system. Although she is implicated in a process of love, she cannot attain Badiou's notion of subjectivity, because her object of love is animal. For Badiou the notion of subjectivity is positive but it does not include the animal, while Deleuze and Guattari view subjectivity itself as a negative element that needs to be surpassed. Désirée's becoming-animal makes her go beyond subjectivity and reach a status of liberation and fulfillment thanks to her proximity to the animal. Thus Désirée's character seems to be constructed more according to a Deleuzian concept of becoming than according to the quest for subjectivity, underlying Badiou's relationship to animality.

Zola gives the following prognostic for a successful future in his article "La vertu de la république:" "Le moindre progrès demande des années de gestation douloureuse, on met un siècle pour obtenir des hommes un peu plus d'équité et de vérité. Toujours l'animal humain reste au fond, sous la peau de l'homme civilisé, prêt à mordre, lorsque l'appétit l'emporte."<sup>75</sup> The naturalist author underlines the harmful and uncontrollable influence animal instincts can have on the human, although he uses here a metaphor of the predatory animal, which is not prevalent in his novels, where farm animals are more frequent.

Nonetheless, political subjectivity is not possible when the border between the human and the animal has not been settled. There is always a chance that the human instinctively has contact with his animal side, which answers negatively the question whether Zola sees the human as an animal as a political subject. We will see in the following chapters that characters like Nana and Renée, who constantly move on the human-animal border, are seen only with

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<sup>75</sup> Emile Zola, "La vertu de la république," *Nouvelle campagne* (Paris, 1897) 15.

difficulty as political subjects. Zola is clearly the one who acquires subjectivity by his commitment to an ethics of truth, namely -of politics, in his works. In contrast to Badiou who gives no truth-basis to pity, Zola does not eliminate the notion of pity from his politics. For Zola, it is normal to react against an offense made to life, such as the scandal of Captain Dreyfus rotting in prison while innocent. Compassion thus has a part in Zola's approach to political subjectivity. In the case of the Dreyfus affair, he is genuinely true to justice and he militates against what seems to him to be a clear example of iniquity. According to Badiou's understanding of an ethics of truth, Zola would gain not only subjectivity but also immortality in his commitment to an ethic of-politics:

There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject – or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject. This is to say that at a given moment, everything he is – his body, his abilities – is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path. This is when the human animal is convoked [*requis*] to be the immortal that he was not yet.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, Zola's love for animals cannot be accounted for by Badiou's ethics of love. Badiou established a clear limit between the human and the animal, while, for Zola, love is responsible for blurring this border. Becoming-animal then becomes a prevalent process to describe this complex human-animal boundary.

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<sup>76</sup> Badiou 40.

#### 4. Renée as Androgynous Human Animal in *La Curée*

##### 4.1. Introduction to the Notion of Androgyny in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The androgynous figure was a symbol widely used in the nineteenth century. Carolyn Heilbrun rightly claims that “The nineteenth and twentieth centuries superseded all others in finding confusion between the sexes terrifying, or indicative of some nameless and horrible threat.”<sup>1</sup> June Singer defines androgyny as “the One which contains the Two; namely, the male (*andro-*) and the female (*gyne*).”<sup>2</sup> For Alan J.L. Busst, androgyny represents optimism at the beginning of the nineteenth century but pessimism at the end of it; it is thus symptomatic of the period. At the start of the nineteenth century, it is a symbol of virtue, of “human solidarity, the brotherhood of man, the unity and continuity of generations and civilizations; and consequently charity, the sense of social justice, sympathy for the downtrodden, for all those who are oppressed, whether women or men.”<sup>3</sup> Busst then views androgyny in the period of decadence as a “symbol of vice, particularly of cerebral lechery, demoniality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism and masochism”<sup>4</sup> and as a lack of belief in the future. Kari Weil thinks that Busst’s optimist/pessimist dichotomy of the nineteenth-century androgyne is problematic, since Balzac’s androgynous characters cannot be properly assigned either of the two types. This refusal to fit in a category shows the complexity of the androgyne in the nineteenth century. Zola’s use of androgyny seems to tend toward the pessimist or vicious aspect presented by Busst; yet in the following reading of *La curée*, I will also underscore the positive side of androgyny.

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Norton, 1982) 29.

<sup>2</sup> June Singer, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality* (Garden City: Anchor, 1976) 20.

<sup>3</sup> Alan J. L. Busst, “The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century,” *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 38.

<sup>4</sup> Busst 39.

Furthermore Weil presents the differences between the terms “androgynous” and “hermaphrodite:”

*Androgynous* suggests a spiritual or psychological state of wholeness and balance arrived at through the joining of masculine and feminine conceived of as complementary and symmetrically opposed. *Hermaphrodite*, on the other hand, calls attention to the visible and physiological fact of two differently sexed but noncomplementary bodies brought together in an unrelieved process of joining and splitting that manifests the irreparable divisions wrought by desire.<sup>5</sup>

In *La curée*, Zola does not use the word *androgynous* but the term *hermaphrodite* to define a sexually ambivalent character. The term *hermaphrodite* literally defines a human being with both an ovary and a testicle, yet Zola never employs this word in the anatomical sense. He refers to *hermaphrodite* in the figurative sense, in the sense of Weil’s definition of the androgynous, which describes an ambiguous or double-natured person. Alternatively, one could believe that he confounds this term with *pseudo-hermaphrodite*, a human being having genitals of one sex but characteristics of the other sex. From a scientific perspective on hermaphroditism, Frédéric Monneyron notes that “les progrès de l’observation scientifique font découvrir des cas d’hermaphroditisme véritable dans le monde animal et végétal, avec juxtaposition des organes mâle et femelle et génération par auto-fécondation,”<sup>6</sup> and that hermaphroditism is classified as a physical anomaly in Saint-Hilaire’s *Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies de*

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<sup>5</sup> Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992) 63.

<sup>6</sup> Frédéric Monneyron, *L’androgynous romantique: du mythe au mythe littéraire* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1994) 54.



*l'organisation* published between 1832 and 1836. Thus hermaphroditism is a topic of interest in scientific studies, and we will see that this perception of it as being anomalous in animals will be applied to humans.

In his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, the memoirs of a French hermaphrodite, Michel Foucault claims that the nineteenth century is “powerfully haunted by the theme of the hermaphrodite”<sup>7</sup> and that this century reveals a crucial relation between sex and truth in society’s laws. Foucault uses the hermaphrodite as an example of the modern sexual subject and concludes that “what she [Herculine] evokes in her past is the happy limbo of a non-identity.”<sup>8</sup> Claudia Moscovici, however, starts with Butler’s objection<sup>9</sup> to Foucault’s interpretation of the hermaphrodite and claims that “only because he ignores the powerful cultural effects of gender upon sex does Foucault propose the hermaphrodite as a model of sexual and civic freedom.”<sup>10</sup> She demonstrates that Herculine does not escape sex and gender rules, and that “By identifying the double dialectical logic of sex and gender in Herculine’s diary, [...] one finds that the hermaphrodite is paradoxically defined by the very gender norms her body violates.”<sup>11</sup> Zola is

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon, 1980) xvii.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault xiii.

<sup>9</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes that “Although he argues in *The History of Sexuality* that sexuality is coextensive with power, he fails to recognize the concrete relations of power that both construct and condemn Herculine’s sexuality. Indeed, he appears to romanticize h/er world of pleasures [...], a world that exceeds the categories of sex and identity” (120).

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Moscovici, *Gender and Citizenship: The Dialectics of Subject-Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) 95.

<sup>11</sup> Moscovici 108-09.

far from Foucault's depiction of Herculine Barbin as a neutral being, since, as I will show later, he underlines the male and female features in the androgynous character.

In "Différences entre Balzac et moi," Zola writes that his predecessor's aim was to portray men, women and things as three separate entities, while he merges man and woman into one: "Moi, des hommes et des femmes, je ne fais qu'un, en admettant cependant les différences de nature [...]"<sup>12</sup> According to Anna Krakowski, this quotation is at the center of Zola's egalitarian stance toward men and women: "Cette attribution au sexe féminin des facultés et dispositions du sexe masculin est à la base de toute sa conception de la femme. [...] En insistant sur le fait que les deux sexes ne forment qu'un seul élément, Zola adopte une attitude nouvelle dans ce domaine."<sup>13</sup> She further claims that Zola's women are men's equals and that the naturalist author avoids "la suprématie mâle."<sup>14</sup> Yet Zola's conception of women is more complex<sup>15</sup> and more subtle, as I have shown at the end of the first chapter and as I will discuss further in my interpretation of *Travail*. Naomi Schor comments on Krakowski's interpretation of this quote from "Différences entre Balzac et moi" as "further evidence that the problem of *difference* haunted him [Zola]."<sup>16</sup> Schor notes that "What is revolutionary about Zola's women is

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<sup>12</sup> Emile Zola, "Différences entre Balzac et moi," *Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, ed. Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol.5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1960-67) 1737.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Krakowski, *La condition de la femme dans l'oeuvre de Zola* (Paris: Nizet, 1974) 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> Krakowski 18.

<sup>15</sup> See Jennings' two excellent articles on Zola and women entitled "Zola féministe?" in *Les Cahiers naturalistes*.

<sup>16</sup> Naomi Schor, "Mother's Day: Zola's Women," *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. David Baguley (Boston: Hall, 1986) 138.

that it is hard to tell them apart from his men,”<sup>17</sup> and that this leads to a contradiction: his work “insists on the specificity of woman’s procreative function while/because it attests to a breakdown of difference between the sexes.”<sup>18</sup> In the following pages I will address the issue of procreation in androgynous characters and underscore the difference in male and female features in Zola’s description of androgynous beings.

I will present Zola’s *La curée* as the main case study on androgynous characters, showing that “L’androgynie, c’est l’ « Un-en-deux », c’est le paradoxe radical.”<sup>19</sup> In a *La Cloche* article entitled “La fin de l’orgie” published in February 1870, Zola describes the cross-dressing concept under the Second Empire: “Ils [des messieurs, des jeunes gens riches] ont inventé de jouer au monde renversé. Ils se sont habillés en femmes [...]”<sup>20</sup> while women are clothed as men. Yet the naturalist author does not imply that homosexual relations occur after this transvestism: on the contrary, men cross-dressed as women enjoy women’s company and women cross-dressed as men enjoy men’s company. Zola sees a return to ancient times: “Les belles nuits de l’orgie antique sont revenues, les nuits ardentes où les créatures n’avaient plus de sexe”<sup>21</sup> and concludes that “Notre virilité s’en est allée.”<sup>22</sup> My analysis implies a contradictory approach in underscoring not only some positive but also some negative connotations underlying the notion of androgyny in *La curée*, which is characteristic of the period: “The polarized view of

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<sup>17</sup> Schor 137.

<sup>18</sup> Schor 137-38.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Libis, *Le mythe de l’androgynie* (Paris: Berg, 1980) 271.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Kanes, *L’atelier de Zola: textes de journaux 1865-1870* (Genève: Droz, 1963) 224.

<sup>21</sup> Kanes 224.

<sup>22</sup> Kanes 225.

androgyny described as a progression from the ideal image of totality to a degraded symbol of perversion reflects the positivist historical perspective from which the literary representation of androgyny in the nineteenth century has been primarily observed.”<sup>23</sup>

In *La curée*, Zola depicts the frenetic life of enjoyment and of debauchery of the upper classes under the Second Empire. One of the author’s aims is to show “à quel effroyable écroulement on en arrive, lorsque les mœurs sont pourries et que les liens de la famille n’existent plus.”<sup>24</sup> Both Renée and Maxime are described as androgynous characters. Renée, the main female character, is ambiguous due to her many-faceted personality and to her double sexual identity. She transgresses the human-animal and the male-female borders more than once, demonstrating that “la décadence amène fatalement à la duplicité.”<sup>25</sup> Maxime’s sex is clearly put into doubt and does not always correspond to his gender. Moreover, the animal subtext is overtly present: Zola compares Saccard’s success as a millionaire to a hunting party: “C’était l’heure où la curée ardente emplît un coin de forêt de l’aboïement des chiens, du claquement des fouets, du flamboïement des torches. Les appétits lâchés se contentaient enfin [...]”<sup>26</sup> This animal metaphor implies that instincts and desires are brutally satisfied; it also figuratively denotes a scramble, a greedy struggle to seize honors or advantages. At the end of the novel, Renée feels hate toward the “mangeurs de curée”<sup>27</sup> who ride, triumphantly exhibiting their richness, in the Bois.

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Ignazia Rubino, “Androgyny and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century French Literature,” diss., Columbia U, 1997, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol. 2. 304.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Belgrand, “Le jeu des oppositions dans *La Curée*,” *La Curée de Zola ou « la vie à outrance »: actes du colloque du 10 janvier*, ed. David Baguley et al. (Paris: SEDES, 1987) 29.

<sup>26</sup> Emile Zola, *La curée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 162.

<sup>27</sup> Zola, *Curée* 334.

#### 4.2. Rape and Renée's and Catherine's Androgyny

Until nineteen years of age, Renée is in a convent, where she satisfies her voyeuristic curiosity by observing men in bathing suits: “C’était une grande fille, d’une beauté exquise et turbulente, qui avait poussé librement dans ses caprices de pensionnaire.”<sup>28</sup> Schor notes Zola’s association of a lesbian connotation to the term *pensionnaire* throughout his work: “in Zola’s idiolect, “pensionnaire” is another way of saying “lesbian.”<sup>29</sup> Renée’s daily accoutrement underlines her sexual duality: “Elle portait une délicieuse jupe de faille bleue, à grands volants, sur laquelle était jetée une sorte d’habit de garde française de soie gris tendre.”<sup>30</sup> This extravagant mixture of feminine and masculine pieces of clothing is both “laid et adorable.”<sup>31</sup> Renée’s femininity as marked by her skirt, gloves, hairstyle and low-cut shirt is undermined by the “petites bottes d’homme”<sup>32</sup> she wears. Renée also exhibits typically male reactions in her desire to challenge one of her friends to a duel: “elle voulut sérieusement se battre en duel, au pistolet, avec la duchesse de Sternich, qui avait, méchamment disait-elle, renversé un verre de punch sur sa robe.”<sup>33</sup> Julien Chevalier notes such a masculinization of upper-class women: “peu à peu, la femme tend à se rapprocher de l’homme, à s’approprier ses allures lâchées, son genre d’existence libre et indépendante.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Zola, *Curée* 109.

<sup>29</sup> Naomi Schor, *Zola’s Crowds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978) 94.

<sup>30</sup> Zola, *Curée* 130.

<sup>31</sup> Zola, *Curée* 130.

<sup>32</sup> Zola, *Curée* 130.

<sup>33</sup> Zola, *Curée* 240.

<sup>34</sup> Julien Chevalier, *Une maladie de la personnalité: l’inversion sexuelle* (Paris, 1893) 221.

On leaving the convent, Renée spends the summer with her friend Adeline and her parents. Renée returns to her aunt Elisabeth sad and grave, and confides the following to her: “un homme de quarante ans, riche, marié, et dont la femme, jeune et charmante, était là, l’avait violentée à la campagne, sans qu’elle sût ni osât se défendre.”<sup>35</sup> This brutal rape which makes Renée pregnant has consequences on her self-esteem: she despises herself and thinks “qu’elle n’avait plus à lutter contre le mal, qu’il était en elle, que la logique l’autorisait à aller jusqu’au bout de la science mauvaise;”<sup>36</sup> this act of perversion inflicted on her makes her become perverse. Renée is a victim in spite of herself. Nathalie Buchet Rogers notes that “C’est ainsi que bien que victime, Renée est perçue [...] comme porteuse de la faute.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed “La faute qui amena plus tard son mariage avec Saccard, ce viol brutal qu’elle subit avec une sorte d’attente épouvantée, la fit ensuite se mépriser, et fut pour beaucoup dans l’abandon de toute sa vie.”<sup>38</sup> To avoid the social consequences of this shameful experience, Renée’s aunt offers a substantial amount of money to her future husband Saccard, although Renée miscarries as a consequence of her tight dresses.

In *Germinal*, Catherine is also depicted as an androgynous being who loses her virginity when raped by Chaval: “elle cessa de se défendre, subissant le mâle avant l’âge, avec cette soumission héréditaire, qui, dès l’enfance, culbutait en plein vent les filles de sa race.”<sup>39</sup> One

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<sup>35</sup> Zola, *Curée* 104.

<sup>36</sup> Zola, *Curée* 148.

<sup>37</sup> Nathalie Buchet Rogers, “Zola, *La Curée* (1872): tragédie, allégorie et haussmannisation,” *Fiction du scandale: corps féminin et réalisme romanesque au dix-neuvième siècle*, ed. Nathalie Buchet Rogers (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1998) 206.

<sup>38</sup> Zola, *Curée* 148.

<sup>39</sup> Emile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 181.

could also consider the mine, which is not a place for women, as Catherine's rapist. On May 19, 1874, a law was passed that forbade women working in the mines. *Germinal* was published in 1885, and the year before, Zola visited coal mines in Anzin. In the novel, the managers do not object to replacing female miners with young men but "le projet d'exclure les femmes du fond répugnait d'ordinaire aux mineurs, qui s'inquiétaient du placement de leurs filles, peu touchés de la question de moralité et d'hygiène."<sup>40</sup> Because she works in a completely masculine environment, Catherine is pictured as an androgynous being, a delicate red-haired young girl whose body is marked by her hard work in the mine:

Fluette pour ses quinze ans, elle ne montrait de ses membres, hors du fourreau étroit de sa chemise, que des pieds bleuis, comme tatoués de charbon, et des bras délicats, dont la blancheur de lait tranchait sur le teint blême du visage, déjà gâté par les continuels lavages au savon noir.<sup>41</sup>

The verb "trancher" underlines Catherine's division into two beings: masculine strength is revealed by her feet and her face marked by coal, while feminine fragility appears in the anemic and delicate tone of her skin. Miner's clothes render her an almost complete male: "elle avait l'air d'un petit homme, rien ne lui restait de son sexe, que le dandinement léger des hanches"<sup>42</sup> but underneath, Catherine remains a female animalized: "Et, nue maintenant, pitoyable, ravalée au trot de la femelle quêtant sa vie par la boue des chemins, elle besognait, la croupe barbouillée

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<sup>40</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 76.

<sup>41</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 63.

de suie, avec de la crotte jusqu'au ventre, ainsi qu'une jument de fiacre."<sup>43</sup> On the day the miners violently confront their managers and Maheu is brutally killed, "on aperçut Catherine, les poings en l'air, brandissant elle aussi des moitiés de briques, les jetant de toute la force de ses petits bras."<sup>44</sup> In spite of an inappropriate length of arms, Catherine is skilled enough to almost hit Etienne on the head. Catherine's frailty thus belies "une liberté de garçon" and an astonishing nervous strength. It is on the same day that Catherine biologically becomes a woman, since the blood staining her skirt is the sign of a possible maternity: "c'était le flot de la puberté qui crevait enfin, dans la secousse de cette journée abominable."<sup>45</sup> In *Germinal*, androgyny is closely linked to the overtly masculine environment of the miners: Catherine's late puberty is due to the milieu's difficult living and working conditions. For both Catherine and Renée, rape, as a violation of the codification of sexual relationships, is a traumatic experience. Yet its relation to androgyny is different in Renée's and Catherine's cases: Renée becomes androgynous after her rape which constitutes the initial point of contamination of perversion and which is the cause of her sexual duality, while Catherine is already androgynous before her rape.

#### **4.3. Excess and Maxime's and Théophile's Androgyny**

Maxime is thirteen years old when his father Saccard summons him to Paris. Apart from his initial farmer's look which implies a certain degree of toughness, Maxime is mainly a delicate

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<sup>43</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 366.

<sup>44</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 494.

<sup>45</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 501.



young man: “un grand galopin fluet, à figure de fille, l’air délicat et effronté, d’un blond très doux.”<sup>46</sup> As a consequence of his attendance at the college in Plassans, Maxime is not only a “collégien vicieux”<sup>47</sup> but also a narcissistic young man as he looks intensively at himself in a little mirror during classes. Furthermore, Maxime has “cet air féminin des demoiselles de collègue”<sup>48</sup> and, the same feminine trait as Catherine in *Germinal*, “le balancement de hanches d’une femme faite.”<sup>49</sup> Maxime thus acquires a “tempérament neutre”<sup>50</sup> in Plassans: “la marque de ses abandons d’enfant, cette effémination de tout son être, cette heure où il s’était cru fille, devait rester en lui, le frapper à jamais dans sa virilité.”<sup>51</sup> His stepmother Renée views him as a doll that she calls *mademoiselle*. She educates him not only to aristocracy and good manners, but she also introduces him to her female friends who see him as a *fillette manquée*: “Ce que Maxime adorait, c’était de vivre dans les jupes, dans les chiffons, dans la poudre de riz des femmes. Il restait toujours un peu fille, avec ses mains effilées, son visage imberbe, son cou blanc et potelé.”<sup>52</sup> She dresses him once as a woman to amuse her friends. Maxime’s feminine temperament is constantly stressed: his fear of water prevents him from swimming with Renée on their summer vacations in Trouville; he denounces his father who tries to steal Renée’s money in the Charogne affair; he feels so cowardly and weak that he cannot put an end to his

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<sup>46</sup> Zola, *Curée* 129.

<sup>47</sup> Zola, *Curée* 131.

<sup>48</sup> Zola, *Curée* 133.

<sup>49</sup> Zola, *Curée* 133.

<sup>50</sup> Zola, *Curée* 133.

<sup>51</sup> Zola, *Curée* 134.

<sup>52</sup> Zola, *Curée* 137.

incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Yet vice best describes him since at seventeen years of age he seduces and impregnates Renée's chambermaid. Furthermore, Maxime, whose eyes are often compared to a prostitute's, has multiple adventures: "Ces yeux de fille à vendre ne se baissaient jamais; ils quêtait le plaisir, un plaisir sans fatigue, qu'on appelle et qu'on reçoit."<sup>53</sup> Later in the novel, he claims that women tire him and that he is cured of his desires: he admits to a cult of adoration for himself. Robert Lethbridge shows that Zola, in an earlier project of the novel, refers to Maxime as a "petit crevé," a young man who does not have to work, who repudiates all morality and ambition and who lives a life of privileges and of pleasure. It is thus inevitable that "the dissipated virility of the "petit crevé" places the type firmly within the nineteenth-century tradition of the androgyne."<sup>54</sup>

Thus androgyny underscores a surprising sexual behavior different from the expectations set by society as in *Pot-Bouille*, where Théophile Vabre, "cet avorton aux cheveux jaunes,"<sup>55</sup> is depicted as an androgynous being because of his impotence. Théophile's feminine side is marked by his scarce beard, his weak health and his looks: "Il était si ahuri, si pauvre avec ses membres grêles et sa face de fille ratée [...]."<sup>56</sup> He is constantly "très enrhumé, enveloppé d'un cache-nez rouge"<sup>57</sup> and he cannot digest his food. These features underscore a lack of virility in Théophile and prevent him from fulfilling his social role of husband: he seems to suffer from a complete

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<sup>53</sup> Zola, *Curée* 152.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Lethbridge, "Zola: Decadence and Autobiography in the Genesis of a Fictional Character," *Nottingham French Studies* 17 (1978): 46.

<sup>55</sup> Emile Zola, *Pot-Bouille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982) 72.

<sup>56</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille* 193.

<sup>57</sup> Zola, *Pot-Bouille* 342.

degeneracy of his body and this from sexual to purely mechanical functions. Because of his sexual defect, his wife Valérie has lovers and is forced to have her child outside marriage to secure her heritage. Androgyny is used to underline Théophile's social inadequacy: this bourgeois is considered a cretin who cannot satisfy his wife's sexual needs. On the whole, Maxime and Théophile's sexual behaviors differ from social norms and are in total opposition: their excesses, debauchery in Maxime's case and impotence in Théophile's case, are marked by the figure of androgyny.

#### **4.4. Renée's Becoming-Animal with Maxime**

As stated above, Renée initiates Maxime to social customs, and they consequently share good companionship: when they go for a ride in the Bois, they gossip about famous people and confide their sorrow to each other. Renée tells Maxime about “une singulière sensation de désirs inavouables”<sup>58</sup> and the need for a “jouissance inconnue que rêvait son assouvissement;”<sup>59</sup> she also tells him that “il lui semblait que le crépuscule emportait derrière elle, dans ses voiles tremblants, la terre du rêve, l'alcôve honteuse et surhumaine où elle eût enfin assouvi son coeur malade, sa chair lassée.”<sup>60</sup> These revelations foreshadow their incestuous sexual relations. One day, Renée, having “caprices de grande mondaine,”<sup>61</sup> forces Maxime to accompany her to a costume ball frequented by prostitutes and to have a lavish meal in a private salon of the Café

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<sup>58</sup> Zola, *Curée* 47.

<sup>59</sup> Zola, *Curée* 50.

<sup>60</sup> Zola, *Curée* 47.

<sup>61</sup> Zola, *Curée* 169.

Riche. Renée dresses up as a man wearing a “domino bleu sombre”<sup>62</sup> and claims that “nous nous débauchons, ce soir... Je suis un homme, moi.”<sup>63</sup> Consequently, Maxime is unsure of her gender: “Par moments, il n’était plus bien sûr de son sexe; la grande ride qui lui traversait le front, l’avancement boudeur de ses lèvres, son air indécis de myope, en faisaient un grand jeune homme; d’autant plus que sa longue blouse de satin noir allait si haut, qu’on voyait à peine, sous le menton, une ligne du cou blanche et grasse.”<sup>64</sup> Renée enjoys her debauched adventure and “elle serait rentrée horriblement maussade, si Maxime n’avait eu l’idée de lui faire goûter au fruit défendu.”<sup>65</sup> That night Maxime and Renée, overtaken by their instincts, commit incest. This relation is illicit since Maxime and Renée are part of the same legal family; yet it is not physical incest since they are not related in blood. Their incestuous relation is thus against the law but not against Nature. Indeed incest also occurs in the animal world, but it is not found “among the larger, longer-lived, slower-maturing, and more intelligent animals”<sup>66</sup> since the latter form families which prevent incest. It is the case that “a certain level of intelligence and length of life are necessary for animals to form stable attachments - that otherwise they will breed with kin or non-kin indifferently.”<sup>67</sup> Thus Renée and Maxime, like the animals of lower intelligence who do not have any barriers against familial inbreeding, do not recognize the social and legal value of

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<sup>62</sup> Zola, *Curée* 170.

<sup>63</sup> Zola, *Curée* 170.

<sup>64</sup> Zola, *Curée* 184.

<sup>65</sup> Zola, *Curée* 175.

<sup>66</sup> David F. Aberle, et al., “The Incest Taboo and the Mating Patterns of Animals,” *American Anthropologist* 65 (1963): 260.

<sup>67</sup> Aberle et al. 260.

the notion of family. Furthermore, when Maxime and Renée watch the play *Phèdre* at the “Théâtre-Italien,” Renée identifies with the Greek heroine and “se demandait de quel sang elle pouvait être, elle, l’incestueuse des temps nouveaux.”<sup>68</sup> In the private salon of the Café Riche, Maxime is the one who initiates sex and Renée does not resist much; they feel embarrassed after this act against social laws. Maxime thinks that he would not have had sexual relations with his stepmother, had she not been dressed as a man. Renée’s cross-dressing makes him forget that she is his father’s wife. As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings rightly proposes, Renée’s “travestissements androgynes signifient la corruption,”<sup>69</sup> both sexual and moral corruption. Moreover, Renée embodies the snake: her silk skirts “glissaient avec des sifflements de couleuvre.”<sup>70</sup> In the Garden of Eden, the snake “symbolizes dangerous knowledge,”<sup>71</sup> it is also a “bearer of dangerous and malefic forces.”<sup>72</sup> Renée’s association with the Genesis myth’s serpent implies that in her participation in incestuous relations she is tasting of “forbidden fruit.”

After their initial sexual encounter, Maxime and Renée have regular sexual relations in the hothouse, the “temple monstrueux,”<sup>73</sup> which appears as a microcosm of a natural and animal world. It is well worth noting that “The sexual inversion thematized throughout the novel is

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<sup>68</sup> Zola, *Curée* 241.

<sup>69</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L’éros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 116.

<sup>70</sup> Zola, *Curée* 165.

<sup>71</sup> Nadia Julien, *The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Elfreda Powell (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996) 385.

<sup>72</sup> Julien 385.

<sup>73</sup> Zola, *Curée* 219.

accomplished in the “artificial” environment of the greenhouse [...].”<sup>74</sup> The exotic hothouse emits sensual and voluptuous desire, and it displays, as an idol, a sphinx of black marble with a cruel feline smile. Rogers sees the powerful fertility in the hothouse as monstrous: “Cette nature ambiguë et artificielle, codée en termes de féminité à la fois castrée et castratrice, dit assez l’angoisse qui sous-entend toute sexualité et qui constitue le pôle négatif du principe de fécondité.”<sup>75</sup> The vegetable heat and proliferation place Renée and Maxime in “plein enfer dantesque de la passion,”<sup>76</sup> where they experience “une tendresse de bêtes farouches.”<sup>77</sup> Renée becomes-*chatte* when “Les cheveux tombés, les épaules nues, elle s’appuyait sur ses poings, l’échine allongée, pareille à une grande chatte aux yeux phosphorescents,”<sup>78</sup> and when, on the dark bear skin, her clashing whiteness appears in her “pose de grande chatte accroupie, l’échine allongée, les poignets tendus, comme des jarrets souples et nerveux.”<sup>79</sup> She then transforms herself into a sphinx:

Le jeune homme, couché sur le dos, aperçut, au-dessus des épaules de cette adorable bête amoureuse qui le regardait, le sphinx de marbre, dont la lune éclairait les cuisses luisantes. Renée avait la pose et le sourire du monstre à tête de

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<sup>74</sup> Tullio Pagano, “Allegorizing *La Curée*,” *Excavatio* 6-7 (1995): 170.

<sup>75</sup> Rogers 216.

<sup>76</sup> Zola, *Curée* 220.

<sup>77</sup> Zola, *Curée* 219.

<sup>78</sup> Zola, *Curée* 216.

<sup>79</sup> Zola, *Curée* 220.

femme, et, dans ses jupons dénoués, elle semblait la sœur blanche de ce dieu noir.<sup>80</sup>

Renée's metamorphosis into the sphinx signals her enigmatic movement not only across the human-animal border but also between the two sexes. Indeed, in the same scene, Renée takes the man's role and submits Maxime to her sexual desires:

Renée était l'homme, la volonté passionnée et agissante. Maxime subissait. Cet être neutre, blond et joli, frappé dès l'enfance dans sa virilité, devenait, aux bras curieux de la jeune femme, une grande fille, avec ses membres épilés, ses maigreurs gracieuses d'éphèbe romain.<sup>81</sup>

Maxime is the prey she possesses entirely and without resistance. She also shows that she is stronger than he: "elle le possédait si despotiquement, qu'il croyait sentir des griffes s'enfoncer dans son épaule, quand elle posait là sa main blanche."<sup>82</sup> John Lapp underlines Zola's concern with inversion in this hothouse scene. He claims that the scene "was originally to have contained overtones of homosexuality:"<sup>83</sup> "Zola wrote that Maxime was to be "un petit crevé jeté à une louve, un coin de sauvagerie... Leur camaraderie qui met une pointe de vice de plus. Ils se

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<sup>80</sup> Zola, *Curée* 216.

<sup>81</sup> Zola, *Curée* 216-17.

<sup>82</sup> Zola, *Curée* 247.

<sup>83</sup> John C. Lapp, "The Watchers Betrayed and the Fatal Woman: Some Recurring Patterns in Zola," *PMLA* 74 (1959): 282.

croyaient frères [...].”<sup>84</sup> It was also planned that Maxime would have been sexually possessed by the homosexual servant Baptiste: in his working notes, Zola wrote that “le valet de chambre l’emmène un jour, etc.”<sup>85</sup> Yet Zola changed his mind and refrained from such explicit and detailed homosexuality in *La curée*. Moreover, Anne Belgrand sees Renée’s control over Maxime in this scene as a personal vengeance: she exerts the same brutality she endured when she was raped. Indeed, she imposes the same scenario as when she was raped by an older man: she is eight years older than her victim Maxime and she dominates him sexually and violently. Since Maxime thinks that “L’idée de posséder Renée ne lui était jamais nettement venue. Il l’avait effleurée de tout son vice sans la désirer réellement. Il était trop mou pour cet effort. Il accepta Renée parce qu’elle s’imposa à lui, et qu’il glissa jusqu’à sa couche, sans le vouloir, sans le prévoir,”<sup>86</sup> I could link Renée’s sexual control over Maxime to the theory of impregnation discussed in the first chapter. Yet it is important to note that Renée is not Maxime’s first lover and that she does not leave any permanent mark on his body. This scenario is thus different from *Thérèse Raquin*, in which the main female character impregnates her lover to a certain extent: Thérèse's nervous nature influences Laurent's sanguine nature to such a point that his character becomes of the nervous type. Laurent thus displays feminine features: he is very sensitive, fearful, he gains weight and becomes ugly, his voice softens, and he receives “des nerfs de femme, des sensations aiguës et délicates”<sup>87</sup> which make him become a talented painter. He becomes more than woman by being impregnated by Thérèse: “sa maîtresse, avec ses souplesses

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<sup>84</sup> Lapp 282. Quoted from *Nouvelles Acquisitions françaises* 10282, foll. 337.

<sup>85</sup> Lapp 282. Quoted from *Nouvelles Acquisitions françaises* 10282, foll. 237, 222.

<sup>86</sup> Zola, *Curée* 213.

<sup>87</sup> Emile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) 228.



de chatte, ses flexibilités nerveuses, s'était glissée peu à peu dans chacune des fibres de son corps."<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.5. Renée as Diana

For all their corruption, nonetheless, Renée and her immediate environment are often portrayed as divine. At dawn, after spending the night with Maxime, she is Diana, the Roman goddess of hunting and of savage nature: "avec sa tête de Diane blonde, ses bras nus qui avaient des poses chastes, son corps pur, dont les attitudes [...] trouvaient des lignes nobles, d'une grâce antique."<sup>89</sup> According to the *Grand Larousse encyclopédique*, there were different types of Dianas in different parts of Italy. For instance, Diana was a chaste goddess but she was also the goddess of fecundity under the name of *Diane Lucine* and supported women suffering during labor. It is clear that Renée does not conceive, and that her sexual behavior does not make her a chaste woman. Yet Renée is more like the most famous type of Diana, that of Nemi, who was the protector of wild game. The day of the celebration of the Diana of Nemi, hunting dogs were honored. There is here a striking link to the title of Zola's novel: in the *curée*, the hunting party, Renée is not a greedy hunter like Saccard but rather a beautiful goddess witnessing such an event. Indeed, Saccard is described as the hunter setting traps when he fools his wife in the financial transaction of the Charogne: "il fallait que Renée fût dépouillée avant que l'expropriation prochaine s'ébruitât. Saccard [...] regardait mûrir son plan avec dévotion, tendait

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<sup>88</sup> Zola, *Thérèse* 88.

<sup>89</sup> Zola, *Curée* 215.

ses pièges avec les raffinements d'un chasseur qui met de la coquetterie à prendre galamment le gibier."<sup>90</sup>

Renée's room is also divinely sumptuous: the bed looks like a chapel ornamented for festivities. Her chambermaid keeps her wardrobe "dans un recueillement de sacristie et une propreté de grande-écurie,"<sup>91</sup> and her "cabinet de toilette," which the whole city of Paris talks about, is marvelous in its extravagance, luxury and sensuality. With regards to animal imagery, two bear skins, extravagantly described as "garnies de velours rose, aux ongles d'argent, et dont les têtes, tournées vers la fenêtre, regardaient fixement le ciel vide de leurs yeux de verre,"<sup>92</sup> constitute pricey bedside rugs, on which Renée has sex. She nervously plays with another bearskin keeping her warm in her carriage: "ses doigts minces qui enroulaient sur leurs fuseaux les longs poils de la peau d'ours."<sup>93</sup> Julien views the bear as a symbol of a "creature of contrasts,"<sup>94</sup> since the bear is a strong and cunning creature who nevertheless relishes sweet berries and fruits. This animal appears to mark Renée's double nature, but it mainly signals the fashionable piece of fur she wears over her naked body.

Finally, Renée's divine essence also appears in the dresses she wears and which the famous couturier Worms designs for her. Yet she feels the end of her reign after her part in the representation of the poem entitled *Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo* at the

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<sup>90</sup> Zola, *Curée* 251.

<sup>91</sup> Zola, *Curée* 209.

<sup>92</sup> Zola, *Curée* 208.

<sup>93</sup> Zola, *Curée* 43.

<sup>94</sup> Julien 33.

costume ball. Renée is indecently underdressed in a transparent and primitive costume of “Otaïtienne” which reveals her naked body and sensual savagery:

Ce costume, paraît-il, est un des plus primitifs: un maillot couleur tendre, qui lui montait des pieds jusqu’aux seins, en lui laissant les épaules et les bras nus; et, sur ce maillot, une simple blouse de mousseline, courte et garnie de deux volants, pour cacher un peu les hanches. Dans les cheveux, une couronne de fleurs des champs; aux chevilles et aux poignets, des cercles d’or. Et rien autre. Elle était nue.<sup>95</sup>

Renée is ashamed of her exposed flesh, and of being an object of admiration. Nelson remarks that “The theme of nudity is coupled with the use of mirrors in the evocation of Renée’s destruction and loss of identity.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Renée is often surrounded by mirrors in the novel, which “heightens Renée’s self-consciousness as a public figure and underlines her sense of futility.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, at the Ministry ball, Renée wears a low-cut and extravagant dress that makes everyone whisper and that makes her look like a bizarre flower: “une si étrange fleur de volupté, à la chair de soie, aux nudités de statue, vivante jouissance qui laissait derrière elle une odeur de plaisir tiède.”<sup>98</sup> Renée is compared to a peculiar orchid, to “les plantes bizarres du plein ciel, qui poussent de toutes parts leurs rejets trapus, noueux et déjetés comme des membres

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<sup>95</sup> Zola, *Curée* 291.

<sup>96</sup> Brian Nelson, “*La Curée*: Speculation and Dissipation,” *Zola and the Bourgeoisie: A Study of Themes and Techniques in Les Rougon-Macquart*, ed. Brian Nelson (London: Macmillan, 1983) 77.

<sup>97</sup> Nelson 77.

<sup>98</sup> Zola, *Curée* 205-06.

infirmes”<sup>99</sup> in the “cage de verre”<sup>100</sup> of the exotic hothouse. Also compared to flowers are Renée’s kisses: “Ses baisers fleurissaient et se fanaient, comme les fleurs rouges de la grande mauve, qui durent à peine quelques heures, et qui renaissent sans cesse [...]”<sup>101</sup> Renée is highly disillusioned and disappointed when her husband is not affected by her incestuous relation. She sees her excessive life unwinding:

Elle assistait à son long effarement, à ce tapage de l’or et de la chair qui était monté en elle, dont elle avait eu jusqu’aux genoux, jusqu’au ventre, puis jusqu’aux lèvres, et dont elle sentait maintenant le flot passer sur sa tête, en lui battant le crâne à coups pressés. C’était comme une sève mauvaise; elle lui avait lassé les membres, mis au cœur des excroissances de honteuses tendresses, fait pousser au cerveau des caprices de malade et de bête.<sup>102</sup>

Once again introduced by a vegetable metaphor, Renée’s love affairs are caused by sap in the form of rhizomatic outgrowths. Renée is also deeply troubled: she cannot grasp “le désir longtemps fuyant, « l’autre chose » vainement cherchée”<sup>103</sup> to make her happy. Renée’s ambiguous personality conceived of multiplicities, acentered rhizomatic structures going in every direction, renders her “la moins analysable des femmes.”<sup>104</sup> As a matter of fact, her

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<sup>99</sup> Zola, *Curée* 78.

<sup>100</sup> Zola, *Curée* 220.

<sup>101</sup> Zola, *Curée* 220.

<sup>102</sup> Zola, *Curée* 311.

<sup>103</sup> Zola, *Curée* 80.

<sup>104</sup> Zola, *Curée* 147.

character is constituted of lines of flight: of animal, divine and feminine reterritorializations. Yet this structure of the rhizome must be linked to metamorphosis and the notion of becoming. One needs to determine then whether Renée's desires are linked to becoming-snake, *-chatte*, -sphinx, -bear, -Diana, -Phèdre, and -woman in the sense of a freeing of molecular functioning. On the one hand, Renée is not fulfilled by her life: she dies early of acute meningitis and her multiple transformations could be interpreted as negative consequences of her dissolute demeanor. Yet I think that Renée's becomings have a positive connotation since they serve to affirm Renée's liberation from society's norms under the Second Empire and to explain one side of her ambiguous but attractive character.

#### **4.6. Renée's and Thérèse's Search for Desire**

As long as her husband is unaware of her forbidden relation with Maxime, Renée's eyes constantly flash because of the extravagant pride she has in her lecherous behavior: "Son dernier orgueil était d'être mariée au père, mais de n'être que la femme du fils."<sup>105</sup> Yet she also suffers from this infamous situation and from the fevers of her imagination: "Si, jusque-là, la pensée de son mari était passée parfois dans l'inceste, comme une pointe d'horreur voluptueuse, le mari, l'homme lui-même, y entra dès lors avec une brutalité qui tourna ses sensations les plus délicates en douleurs intolérables."<sup>106</sup> Saccard, who rarely sees his wife and who maintains a famous

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<sup>105</sup> Zola, *Curée* 232.

<sup>106</sup> Zola, *Curée* 240.

prostitute, does not realize that “L’inceste sape les fondements sociaux:”<sup>107</sup> she is thus not guilty, and her crime does not violate any law. Indeed Saccard does not require any explanations from Renée regarding her behavior, he is totally satisfied with her signing the act of cessation and with buying Renée’s part in the Charogne transaction for such a small amount of money. Roddey Reid considers Renée’s incest a twofold crime: “Renée’s transgression turns out to be a double one: incest with her stepson who is not even a properly gendered man.”<sup>108</sup> Renée truly desires the “Law of the Father” since she deplores Saccard’s lack of reaction after the terrible news: “Alors le drame était fini? Son crime, les baisers dans le grand lit gris et rose, les nuits farouches de la serre, tout cet amour maudit qui l’avait brûlée pendant des mois, aboutissait à cette fin plate et ignoble. Son mari savait tout et ne la battait même pas.”<sup>109</sup> Reid sees a double absence of the Law: “in Maxime who “is not” a (heterosexual) man and in Saccard, his father, who traded the negative sanctions of the Law for a real-estate title.”<sup>110</sup> This double violation reflects the two types of infractions against the law proposed by Foucault: those “against the legislation (or morality) pertaining to marriage and the family” and those “against the regularity of a natural function.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed Renée, herself a victim of rape, commits incest, which is a crime both against the institution of marriage and against the heterosexual codification of sexual relations.

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<sup>107</sup> Maryse Adam-Maillet, “Renée, poupée dans *La Curée*,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 41 (1995): 54.

<sup>108</sup> Roddey Reid, “Perverse Commerce: Familial Pathology and National Decline in *La Curée*,” *Families in Jeopardy: Regulating the Social Body in France, 1750-1910*, ed. Roddey Reid (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 265.

<sup>109</sup> Zola, *Curée* 309.

<sup>110</sup> Reid 273.

<sup>111</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I. An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990) 39.

The fact that she is conscious of her fault makes her a victim of this society of pleasure; one needs to be as unscrupulous as Saccard to survive under the Second Empire.

Janell Watson interprets the novel *La curée* in the light of a gendered political economy, in which speculation is masculine and consumption feminine. Yet these two categories cannot always be distinguished because notions of speculation and consumption are often inseparable. Speculation masculinizes Saccard who avoids consumption because it is “subordinated to and made an integral part of his speculation;”<sup>112</sup> while Renée embodies feminine features linked to consumption in her relation with Saccard: she “is not only a consumed luxury, she is also a consumer in her own right.”<sup>113</sup> Watson concludes that Renée is “the novel’s economic victim”<sup>114</sup> in a patriarchal system. She dies because she cannot find satisfaction in consumption and because she is owned by her husband: “Renée [...] vit que Saccard l’avait jetée comme un enjeu, comme une mise de fonds, et que Maxime s’était trouvé là pour ramasser ce louis tombé de la poche du spéculateur. Elle restait une valeur dans le portefeuille de son mari; [...] il la tordait dans les flammes de sa forge, se servant d’elle, ainsi que d’un métal précieux, pour dorer le fer de ses mains.”<sup>115</sup> She is also split between two conceptions of life,<sup>116</sup> her husband’s feverish speculations and her bourgeois father’s careful savings. As for Maxime, he finds pleasure in consuming frenetically: he “is able to take pleasure in every aspect of his decadent life, including

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<sup>112</sup> Janell Watson, “The Gendered Political Economy of Zola’s *La Curée*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 25.1-2 (1996-97): 123.

<sup>113</sup> Watson 121.

<sup>114</sup> Watson 128.

<sup>115</sup> Zola, *Curée* 312.

<sup>116</sup> See Brian Nelson’s “*La Curée*: Speculation and Dissipation” for further details.

consumption, because his double gender, in rendering him a marginal figure, allows him to escape the constraints of a system that cannot contain him.”<sup>117</sup>

Just like Renée, Thérèse Raquin’s masculinity renders her androgynous as a born criminal when she plans a crime against the institution of marriage, her husband’s murder. Cesare Lombroso defined the concept of the “born criminal” in *L’homme criminel* in 1876: according to this theory, there is a specific human character that is devoted to crime and that is little different from the savage. Thérèse exhibits most of the physical characteristic of the “born criminal:” “lèvres minces, cheveux noirs et abondants, mâchoires fortes, front bas et fuyant, beauté plus virile que féminine, cruauté diabolique, sexualité excessive, intelligence, audace, [...]”.<sup>118</sup> For Lombroso, the female offender is clearly more virile than the average woman, and “Her maternal sense is weak because psychologically and anthropologically she belongs more to the male than to the female sex.”<sup>119</sup> Indeed when Thérèse realizes that she carries Laurent’s child, she does not display any maternal feelings and is rather appalled by this discovery. The female born criminal also has intense sexual tendencies and is prone to dominate weaker beings, like Laurent whose temperament is subordinated to Thérèse. Thus androgynous beings such as Renée and Thérèse are prone to committing crimes against the law of marriage to satisfy their sexual desires and to submit their lovers to them.

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<sup>117</sup> Watson 127.

<sup>118</sup> Colette Becker, “*Thérèse Raquin*: la science comme projet, le fantasme comme aveu,” *Excavatio* 1 (1992): 8.

<sup>119</sup> Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (Littleton: Rothman, 1980) 153.



#### 4.7. Renée and Maxime as Monsters

In a letter of 1871 to Louis Ulbach, Zola describes the scientific significance of *La curée* in seeing Maxime as “le produit d’une société épuisée, l’homme-femme,”<sup>120</sup> and Renée as “la Parisienne affolée jetée au crime par le luxe et la vie à outrance.”<sup>121</sup> Both are “monstruosités sociales.”<sup>122</sup> In designating Maxime and Renée as *monstruosités*, Zola implies the two meanings of the term: both characters suffer from an important bodily anomaly, and both are examples of what is *monstrueux*, strange, extraordinary, prodigious.<sup>123</sup> In relation to the first sense of the word, Maxime and Renée exhibit a malformed sexuality: their appearance does not correspond to their sexual orientation, and their androgynous gender is more complex than one specific category. The second meaning of *monstruosité* implies a positive connotation and transcends its first negative meaning: Maxime and Renée are extraordinary in the sense that they remain enigmatic, fascinating and even uncanny. In modifying the term *monstruosité* with the adjective “social,” Zola underlines the specificity of their vice as a threat to society’s good order. Yet Reid stresses the complex value of these monsters, whose essence is beyond danger:

Monsters are not simply threatening; they are also enigmatic and even at times unrecognizable, they require decipherment and investigation. As purveyor of social monsters, Zola establishes his credentials as the guardian of their cultural

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<sup>120</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 304.

<sup>121</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.2. 304.

<sup>122</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol.2. 304.

<sup>123</sup> Definitions from *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*.

intelligibility through his writing, an intelligibility that is primarily one of gender and sex.<sup>124</sup>

The etymological root of *monstruosité* is the Latin verb *monere*, meaning to draw attention to. Zola thus warns his readers of the excesses of debauchery, which transform its followers into monsters, into mysterious and menacing beings. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault discusses the animal connotation associated with monsters. He claims that, before the nineteenth century, madmen are beast-like monsters in the etymological sense of the Latin *monstrare*, as unusual persons to be shown.<sup>125</sup>

Animal metaphors occur primarily in Renée's case rather than in Maxime's; on one occasion, Maxime is said to show "une obéissance d'animal battu"<sup>126</sup> to Renée. This idiomatic structure does not give striking information on Maxime, except the already known fact that he is dominated by his stepmother. Both Renée and Maxime are equally monstrous: Renée's animality adds a supplementary dimension to her enigmatic nature, while Maxime's neutrality underlines his primitive state as "étrange avorton"<sup>127</sup> and "produit défectueux."<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, Marie-Hélène Huet writes that teratology, the science of monsters, is founded in the nineteenth century by Saint-Hilaire. She stresses the monster's sexual shortcoming and describes it as follows: "The

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<sup>124</sup> Reid 248.

<sup>125</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988) 70.

<sup>126</sup> Zola, *Curée* 303.

<sup>127</sup> Zola, *Curée* 137.

<sup>128</sup> Zola, *Curée* 152.

monster is that which is incapable of performing certain functions, one of the most important of which is reproduction.”<sup>129</sup> Maxime impregnates Renée’s chambermaid, which shows that he is not incapable of reproduction. Yet his sexual relations with his stepmother, in spite of their frequency, remain sterile. Thus reproduction is at stake in Zola’s depiction of debauched androgynous beings: the repulsiveness exerted from their peculiar sexual encounters prevents the conception of children, because it morally endangers Zola’s positive connotation associated with fertility. Nevertheless the fact that Renée’s sexual relations do not lead to conception is unnatural in the animal world and thus moves her status beyond animality. In the same way, her perverse sexuality in its androgynous form brings her out of animality, since such cross-dressing does not occur in Nature. She thus transcends her animal side and acquires human subjectivity.

The term *hermaphrodite* is never used to describe Renée who displays an enigmatic sexuality; it only occurs to address Maxime, of “tempérament neutre.”<sup>130</sup> He is the “hermaphrodite étrange venu à son heure dans une société qui pourrissait,”<sup>131</sup> a neutral being because his masculine side is subverted by his more prominent feminine side. In the same vein as Zola, Roland Barthes relates androgyny to the neuter: “l’androgynie, c’est le Neutre, mais le Neutre, c’est en fait le degré complexe: [...] l’homme en qui il y a du féminin, la femme en qui il y a du masculin.”<sup>132</sup> Moreover, Nelson relates Maxime’s neutral sex to sterility: “The themes of degeneration, dehumanisation and factitiousness are closely associated with images of sterility.

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<sup>129</sup> Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993) 108.

<sup>130</sup> Zola, *Curée* 133.

<sup>131</sup> Zola, *Curée* 152.

<sup>132</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le neutre: notes de cours au Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. Thomas Clerc (Paris: Seuil, 2002) 242.

Maxime, although totally corrupt, remains sexless. It is planned that he should marry Louise de Mareuil, a grotesque emblematic figure whose sexless quality is strongly emphasized.”<sup>133</sup> Indeed, Louise is a rich but hunchbacked girl who looks like a boy and who dies of poor health six months after her wedding. Maxime reappears totally transformed in the novel *L'argent*: he is an idle widower suffering from rheumatism and leading a solitary but happy life. Saccard describes him pitifully as a “pauvre garçon, épuisé à vingt-cinq ans, rangé, avare même, si vieilli de vices, si inquiet de sa santé, qu’il ne risquait plus une dépense ni une jouissance, sans en avoir réglémenté le bénéfice.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, in *L'argent*, Maxime moves beyond his status of monster by losing his sexual intensity and ambiguity.

In *Le mythe de l'androgynie*, Libis presents two possible degrees of sexuality linked to androgyny: “Ou bien l’androgynie tend vers un degré zéro de sexualité: il représente alors ce qu’on pourrait appeler l’ « angélisme » asexué; ou bien au contraire, il devient porteur d’une sexualité hyperbolique qui multiplie ses capacités érotiques.”<sup>135</sup> Both Maxime and Renée fit in the second category, since they do not have an angelic and asexual behavior but go to the full extent of their sexual perversities and even beyond them. Libis views androgyny as a highly ambiguous figure; the mixture of the feminine and the masculine leads either to accumulation as in the Ovidian hermaphrodite in which the opposed sexual elements mark a definite division in a being or to synthesis as in the Platonic androgynie in which the masculine and feminine merge and reflect unity:

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<sup>133</sup> Nelson 70.

<sup>134</sup> Emile Zola, *L'argent* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) 182.

<sup>135</sup> Jean Libis, *Le mythe de l'androgynie* (Paris: Berg, 1990) 131.

[L]'androgyn, l'homme-femme, est évidemment, et par excellence, la figure de l'ambiguïté. Mais cette ambiguïté ne se limite pas à son identité immédiate, attestée par son étymologie duelle. Elle réside aussi dans le trait d'union paradoxal, impensable, qui relie en lui le masculin et le féminin. Si l'on veut simplifier cette difficulté et l'exposer de façon schématique, on peut dire que l'androgyn peut être imaginé ou bien sur le mode de la cumulation, de la conjonction, de la pro-thèse ; ou bien sur le mode de la fusion, de l'immixion, de la syn-thèse. Dans le premier cas, le masculin et le féminin survivent peu ou prou à leur union ; leurs pouvoirs se complètent ou, d'une certaine manière, s'additionnent. Dans le second cas, le masculin et le féminin sont résolument arrachés à leur identité respective, et de cette dissolution ontologique radicale naît un nouvel être, qualitativement irréductible aux protagonistes initiaux.<sup>136</sup>

Maxime and Renée both exhibit features of the opposite sex, which are not fused as in Libis' second case. On the contrary, Maxime and Renée's feminine and masculine sides are juxtaposed and kept distinct by the author. Although Zola refrains from giving anatomical descriptions of a true hermaphrodite in *La curée*, he emphasizes the lack of clear sexual differentiation between the sexes in the androgyny of Maxime and Renée.

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<sup>136</sup> Jean Libis, "L'androgyn et le nocturne," *L'androgyn*, ed. Jean Libis et al. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986) 12.

#### 4.8. Toward a Transcendence of Animality

As Nancy Ignazia Rubino claims, “The subversive aspect of androgyny, [...] , operates not [...] as a blurring of sexual distinctions and boundaries; but rather, as a denial of sexual neutrality and a promotion of difference.”<sup>137</sup> Zola’s androgyny emphasizes the divergences between the sexes and relates well to Hélène Cixous’ second type of bisexuality. In *La jeune née* and in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous distinguishes two types of bisexuality. The first derives from Ovid’s asexual hermaphrodite made of two halves, from a fantasy of unity, of two into the neutral one. The other bisexuality reveals rather than cancels sexual differences: “each one’s location in self [...] of the presence [...] of both sexes, non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this “self-permission,” multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body.”<sup>138</sup> It is clear that the presence of masculinity and femininity within a single character does not merge, but that it rather marks sexual differences. Indeed, the androgyny analyzed in Zolian characters such as Catherine, Théophile, Thérèse, Maxime and Renée, emphasizes a complex relation between sex and gender. The latter as socially defined presents definite expectations associated to the former; disrespect of these social expectations causes abnormal characteristics, such as Théophile’s impotence, Catherine’s excessive masculinity caused by her animal work in the mine and Maxime’s female gender in a male body. There is thus a reversal of the lawful roles defined by society: Théophile is sexually inept and at the mercy of his wife; Catherine is not protected by the capital which makes her work in the mine; Maxime does not hesitate to sleep with his father’s wife; Thérèse dominates her sexual partner. Moreover, “Sexual passion, especially when it is embodied by women,

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<sup>137</sup> Rubino 17.

<sup>138</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980) 254.

represents in Zola's fiction a disruptive social force that must be channeled and controlled,"<sup>139</sup> otherwise social institutions such as those of marriage and family are not respected. In conclusion, Zola implies that sexual relations must be socially codified, but he also shows that Renée and Maxime's monstrous natures make them enigmatic and bewildering. Renée has a many-faceted personality which renders her "la moins analysable des femmes"<sup>140</sup> and which announces the mythic femme fatale Nana. At the end of the novel, Renée even moves beyond the human-animal boundary while Maxime totally drops his mystery after Renée's and his wife's deaths. Both Renée and Maxime gain human subjectivity by transcending their monstrosity.

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<sup>139</sup> Pagano 170.

<sup>140</sup> Zola, *Curée* 147.

## 5. Zola and Medical-Literary Discourse on Homosexuality

### 5.1. The Human/the Animal in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Medical Discourse on Sexual Inversion

David Halperin gives 1892 as the year when the term ‘homosexuality’ entered the English language. Beforehand this type of sexual deviancy, as it was considered at the time, was denoted by the term ‘sexual inversion,’ which designated not only “a total reversal of one’s sex role” in the sense that male homosexuals displayed effeminacy and lesbians masculinity, but also sexual “aberrations in one’s sex-defined social role”<sup>1</sup> such as excesses or “non-procreative sexual activity.”<sup>2</sup> This term also shows that “sexual preference for a person of one’s own sex was not clearly distinguished from other sorts of non-conformity to one’s culturally defined sex-role.”<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault describes the nineteenth century as an “age of multiplication,” as a period displaying “a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of “perversions.””<sup>4</sup> Moreover, sexual categories, which were fluid during the July Monarchy, “were developed into fixed definitions”<sup>5</sup> after 1848. This period also witnesses a change in the conception of desire: there is a shift from “desire as a means to the ultimate end of procreation in favor of desire as an end in itself.”<sup>6</sup> In this section, I will analyze the animal

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<sup>1</sup> George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” *Salmagundi* 58-59 (1982-1983): 119.

<sup>2</sup> Chauncey 119.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 15.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990) 37.

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Thompson, “Creating Boundaries: Homosexuality and the Changing Social Order in France, 1830-1870,” *Homosexuality in Modern France*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 103.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Birken, *Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 93.



subtext present in a selection of medical studies on homosexuality from the second half of the nineteenth century and link this subtext to the human description of sexual inversion offered in those texts. Zola wrote a preface to a medical study on sexual inversion, which underscores his interest in the subject. He also notes after reading Prosper Lucas that “Les embrassements de deux époux trop semblables restent inféconds.”<sup>7</sup> In *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle*, in his discussion of the laws of heredity, more particularly of the parents’ physical and moral influences on their offspring, Lucas succinctly mentions hermaphroditism and claims that “toute tendance à la similitude des parties génitales éveille la répulsion.”<sup>8</sup> Lucas gives an animal example in the bull which is not excited by a hermaphroditic cow, since “la loi de l’amour est l’accord des contrastes.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the result of a relationship with similar partners is sterility: “du moins est-il prouvé que la copulation a besoin de certains rapports de différences entre les deux auteurs pour n’être pas inféconde.”<sup>10</sup> In continuing with the theme of androgyny discussed in the previous chapter, we will see that “it is not so much the characteristic of same-sex attraction that these writers [medical experts] emphasize as it is the androgynous nature of homosexuals.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Emile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, ed. Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1960-67) 1713.

<sup>8</sup> Prosper Lucas, *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l’hérédité naturelle*, vol.2 (Paris, 1847) 237-38.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas 238.

<sup>10</sup> Lucas 238.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Rado, *The Modern Androgyne Imagination: A Failed Sublime* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2000) 16.

Ambroise Tardieu was “the first to bring [a] subtle quality of scientific scrutiny and interpretation”<sup>12</sup> to this field of study in his *Etude médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs* published in 1857. Tardieu, a medical expert for the court, asserted that he could detect homosexuals by a precise examination of the genitals, the buttocks and the anus, and could determine their active or passive role in the relationship. For instance, the most characteristic and valuable sign of homosexuality is the “anus infundibuliforme,”<sup>13</sup> which designates a funnel-shaped anus. Yet Tardieu’s successors in the field criticized his emphasis on physical signs as ludicrous<sup>14</sup> and his stance as limited since he only focused on the acquired form of homosexuality and left aside the innate cases. As to the human-animal connotation, Tardieu applies a physiognomical approach to his analysis of the active homosexual’s genitals, when he compares the glans to a pointy animal muzzle: “Lorsque, au contraire, le pénis est très volumineux, ce n’est plus la totalité de l’organe qui subit un amincissement graduel de la racine à l’extrémité: c’est le gland qui, étranglé à sa base, s’allonge quelquefois démesurément, de manière à donner l’idée du museau de certains animaux.”<sup>15</sup> In another instance, Tardieu compares a homosexual’s excessively small penis to a dog’s. Tardieu “dehumanizes his

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<sup>12</sup> Vernon A. Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 72.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Hahn, *Nos ancêtres les pervers: la vie des homosexuels sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Orban, 1979) 198.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Copley, *Sexual Moralities in France, 1780-1980: New Ideas on the Family, Divorce and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 1989) 106.

<sup>15</sup> Hahn 204.

subject”<sup>16</sup> and underlines a human regression to an inferior stage by making such precise animal comparisons. The use of the human-animal border is a powerful rhetorical tool that allows “Tardieu to create artificial codifications that serve his own ends and that thus accord him limitless knowledge and, subsequently, limitless power over his subject and over his reader.”<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that Zola does not adopt such a medical and scientific stance on homosexuality; he seems to show more respect for his characters.

In 1882, Jean-Martin Charcot and Valentin Magnan published their article “Inversion du sens génital” in which they view homosexuality as a bizarre phenomenon, as an “anomalie sexuelle bien singulière.”<sup>18</sup> According to Vernon Rosario,<sup>19</sup> it is Charcot and Magnan who introduced the term *inversion sexuelle* into the French language for the first time. The majority of the cases they present exhibit sexual perversions, such as ejaculation at the sight or contact with nails or nightcaps, which they explain as symptoms of hereditary psychopathic troubles. According to Charcot and Magnan, these examples of impulses are manifestations of an intellectual degeneracy rather than of licentious behavior: “avant même qu’une éducation vicieuse [...] ait eu le temps de modifier l’individu, l’impulsion se montre pressante, impérieuse,

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<sup>16</sup> Nigel E. Smith, “Silence, Secrecy, and Scientific Discourse in the Nineteenth Century,” *Articulations of Difference*, ed. Dominique D. Fisher and Lawrence R. Schehr (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 91.

<sup>17</sup> Smith 91.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot and Valentin Magnan, “Inversion du sens génital,” *Archives de neurologie* 3 (1882): 297.

<sup>19</sup> Vernon A. Rosario, “Histoire d’inversion: Novelizing Homosexuality at the Fin de Siècle,” *Articulations of Difference*, ed. Dominique D. Fisher and Lawrence R. Schehr (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 103.

avec tous les caractères d'irresponsabilité qui la font distinguer."<sup>20</sup> Their main conclusion is that "la perversion instinctive qui nous occupe [l'inversion sexuelle] n'est qu'une manifestation saillante d'un état psychopathique beaucoup plus profond."<sup>21</sup> Unlike Tardieu who linked homosexuality to vice, Charcot and Magnan, who were influenced by hereditary and degenerative theories like those proposed by Prosper Lucas and Bénédicte Morel,<sup>22</sup> planned to enlighten the judiciary system and to defend innocent victims who suffer from "des sentiments pervers innés."<sup>23</sup> Charcot and Magnan's medical study marked a crucial turning point in the conception of homosexuality in the nineteenth century: Copley notes that homosexuality was considered criminal until the 1880s<sup>24</sup> and that Charcot and Magnan worked on this "shift in attitude:" "a shift from a criminal model for the homosexual as pathological."<sup>25</sup>

Medical publications on sexual inversion were rather prolific near the end of the nineteenth century. Besides Georges Saint-Paul's *Tares et poisons: perversion et perversité sexuelles* to which Zola wrote the preface and which I will discuss below, Julien Chevalier thinks that the discovery of animality in men is the most important discovery made in the nineteenth century. Chevalier notes that the study of animal homosexuality enlightens the examination of human homosexuality: "on agrandit le débat en l'élevant à la hauteur d'un problème de biologie

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<sup>20</sup> Charcot and Magnan 321.

<sup>21</sup> Charcot and Magnan 299.

<sup>22</sup> Rosario, *Histoire d'inversion* 103.

<sup>23</sup> Charcot and Magnan 304.

<sup>24</sup> Copley 107.

<sup>25</sup> Copley 135-36.

générale; on a sous la main et constamment un moyen de contrôle.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, animals, whose behaviors are not dictated by morality and conscience, “nous livrent la vérité toute nue; on serait donc deux fois coupables de négliger les leçons d’un tel enseignement.”<sup>27</sup> Havelock Ellis and John Symonds, the authorities on homosexuality in nineteenth century England, also emphasize the necessity to describe homosexuality in animals before analyzing it in humans, since they claim that the phenomenon is “yet scarcely or at all differentiated”<sup>28</sup> among animals and humans. Chevalier offers an interesting remark on the notion of instinct in *De l’inversion de l’instinct sexuel au point de vue médico-légal* published in 1885. He replaces Charcot and Magnan’s creation of the term *inversion du sens génital* with *inversion de l’instinct sexuel* claiming that the phenomenon in question is “un instinct, avec tous les caractères qui le distinguent (spontanéité, etc.); c’est un instinct comme celui de la conservation, après lequel il vient en puissance.”<sup>29</sup> Chevalier further describes the instinct as “fixe, infaillible, inaltérable, ni perfectible, ni dégradable [...] il agit en automate et pur mécanisme. On ne le gouverne pas, on le subit.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, Chevalier underlines similar reactions to the demands of instincts in humans and animals: “la non satisfaction d’un même besoin fonctionnel provoque chez l’homme et chez les

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<sup>26</sup> Julien Chevalier, *Une maladie de la personnalité: l’inversion sexuelle* (Paris, 1893) xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Chevalier xviii.

<sup>28</sup> Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (New York: Arno, 1975) 2.

<sup>29</sup> Julien Chevalier, *De l’inversion de l’instinct sexuel au point de vue médico-légal* (Paris, 1885) 17.

<sup>30</sup> Chevalier, *Maladie* 6.

animaux un désordre identique.”<sup>31</sup> Yet he makes a crucial distinction between a human and an animal response to the appeal of homosexuality:

Ce qui, sous ce rapport, différencie l’animal de l’homme, c’est qu’il obéit passivement à un instinct brutal, sans perversité ni préméditation; il faut la privation absolue de femelle, dont, par contre, le retour rappelle les impulsions normales. Chez l’homme conscient et muni de pouvoirs modérateurs, il entre plus ou moins un sentiment de plaisir dépravé; le simple contact sans la continence absolue suffit pour la production du vice, lequel, il faut le dire, ne prend pas toujours fin avec les conditions d’existence.<sup>32</sup>

Chevalier thus claims that animals cannot be suspected of depravity<sup>33</sup> since they do not possess the faculty to control their instincts, whereas humans do have such a faculty, which nevertheless does not prevent them from being influenced by their instincts.

Dr. Laupps,<sup>34</sup> a sexologist and Zola’s friend, published *Tares et poisons: perversion et perversité sexuelles*, a medical study on homosexuality in 1896. In the first chapter of his study, Saint-Paul, who was a “student of the prominent forensic doctor Alexandre Lacassagne,”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Chevalier, *De l’inversion* 94.

<sup>32</sup> Chevalier, *Maladie* 206.

<sup>33</sup> Chevalier, *Maladie* 211.

<sup>34</sup> Laupps is the inversion of the author’s real name, Saint-Paul (Georges).

<sup>35</sup> Rosario, *Histoire d’inversion* 109. Lacassagne was also interested in the discourse on animal homosexuality. He published an article entitled “De la Criminalité chez les Animaux” in the *Revue Scientifique* of 1882, in which he shows that young animals such as puppies may have sexual intercourse with their own sex in the absence of the opposite sex.

thanks the naturalist author for “l’intérêt qu’il témoigne à [ses] études”<sup>36</sup> and presents the results of his survey on sexual inversion. Rosario notes that “Dr. Laupts had bravely launched a national “Enquête sur l’inversion sexuelle”” and that the “questionnaire was published in the *Archives d’anthropologie criminelle* but was addressed to professors, lawyers, and novelists, as well as doctors.”<sup>37</sup> Saint-Paul defines sexual inversion as “l’amour anormal, ressenti par certains êtres, pour des individus du sexe même auquel ils appartiennent.”<sup>38</sup> In his classification of inversion, the first type groups the “invertis-nés à stigmates physiques apparents,”<sup>39</sup> considered serious and monstrous cases of homosexuality in the form of effeminate men or masculinized women. The second type, which has a hereditary origin, is constituted of “inverti-né cérébral,” either “masculiphile,” men or women more masculine than their partner, or “féminiphile,” men or women more feminine than their partner. Medical experts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century always distinguish a female and a masculine partner in a homosexual relation; homosexuality is thus inscribed in Judith Butler’s notion of the heterosexual matrix.<sup>40</sup> It follows that “in this scheme of things, there are only two sexes and only opposites can attract.”<sup>41</sup> The third type of inversion introduced by Saint-Paul is easily curable and comprises “invertis d’occasion,” who experience homosexuality as the consequence of closed milieus, such as convents, prisons or boarding schools. The fourth

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<sup>36</sup> Georges Saint-Paul, *Tares et poisons: perversion et perversité sexuelles* (Paris, 1896) 44.

<sup>37</sup> Rosario, *Histoire d’inversion* 110.

<sup>38</sup> Saint-Paul 6.

<sup>39</sup> Saint-Paul 24.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 45-100.

<sup>41</sup> Roddey Reid, *Families in Jeopardy: Regulating the Social Body in France, 1750-1910* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 58.

and final type concerns inversion as a symptom of hereditary disorder, which regroups, in his terms, perverted and degenerated people rather than inverts.

According to Saint-Paul, sexual inversion is either a monstrosity or a consequence of social life. He also underlines that inversion, which has existed in every race and in every country, is nevertheless unnatural and perverse:

Nous ne regardons pas l'inversion comme un mode d'évolution normal de l'instinct sexuel, et je ne pense point que personne ose soutenir jamais qu'il s'agit là d'une tendance naturelle, d'un effort vers la création d'un sexe neutre dont les membres ne seraient point destinés à la reproduction, ainsi qu'il en va chez certains insectes. Chez nous, inversion sexuelle est synonyme de déviation, de perversion, de difformité ou de faute et d'infamie [...].<sup>42</sup>

In comparing human homosexuality to animal homosexuality, Saint-Paul argues that the types of humans prone to homosexuality are not sexually neutral and sterile as is the case in certain types of insects. The derogatory terms he associates with human homosexuality suggest that sexual inversion in animals is more acceptable since it only concerns insects unable to reproduce. Yet his style is tentative: he uses the nominal structure *synonyme de* to avoid any direct affirmation. Moreover, Saint-Paul claims that sexual inversion in humans indicates perversion or perversity; he distinguishes these two essential terms as the former being an innate condition independent of human will and the latter a vicious behavior controlled by the individual. Perversity also designates any act that does not lead to reproduction: “nous pouvons dire que la *perversité*

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<sup>42</sup> Saint-Paul 31.



*sexuelle* entache tout acte qui ne tend point à la fin naturelle, *la reproduction*.”<sup>43</sup> In his response to Saint-Paul’s survey on sexual inversion, Gabriel Tarde underlines the importance of the notion of reproduction and of family for “l’amour normal,” a rare type of human love at the time: “L’amour vraiment normal, par suite, très rare, [...] du moins à l’état de *normalité* parfaite, est celui où non seulement les fins vitales de la génération et de la pureté des races, mais les fins sociales de la grandeur patriotique, de la conservation familiale, de la pureté des mœurs, sont poursuivies ensemble.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, for Tarde, abnormality is the rule in the society of the second half of the nineteenth century. This type of argument has been advanced for a long time, as in Plato who condemns heterosexual relations that do not lead to reproduction and who suggests that “L’unique but qui légitime la sexualité est la génération d’enfants.”<sup>45</sup> Saint-Paul also writes that “Il faut imiter la nature”<sup>46</sup> and that men and women should reproduce to increase the birthrate, which was low in France at the end of the nineteenth century. It is interesting that Saint-Paul proposes two opposing reactions to sexual inversion: one should be tolerant of a homosexual suffering from an innate condition but one should feel repulsion toward a homosexual who chooses his behavior for sexual gratification. Saint-Paul has thus an irreconcilable opinion on this issue; his stance implies that one needs to distinguish an “inverti-né cérébral” from the monstrous type of homosexual before giving judgment. Indeed Copley notices these two perspectives in medical experts’ reactions: “If legal medicine had responded to the new insights of the psychiatrists by differentiating between congenital and acquired homosexuality, their

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<sup>43</sup> Saint-Paul 277.

<sup>44</sup> Saint-Paul 232.

<sup>45</sup> Dominique Fernandez, *Le rapt de Ganymède* (Paris: Grasset, 1989) 13.

<sup>46</sup> Saint-Paul 366.

qualified sympathy for the former condition was balanced by a correspondingly tougher judgmental approach to the latter.”<sup>47</sup> I will now show that Zola offers an identically contradictory position in his preface to Saint-Paul’s medical study.

## 5.2. Zola’s Preface to Saint-Paul’s Medical Study on Homosexuality

It is surprising that Zola does not include a clear picture of homosexuality in his naturalist project. In the preface he wrote in 1895 to *Tares et poisons: perversions et perversité sexuelles*, Zola explains his position to some extent but he remains cautious. In a letter of May 1895 to Saint-Paul, Zola warns his friend that his preface “ne peut être qu’une lettre [...] lettre assez courte, dans laquelle je vous conterai simplement l’histoire du manuscrit que je vous ai remis, en le jugeant brièvement à mon point de vue.”<sup>48</sup> He also gives the reasons for his refusal to publish the *Roman d’un inverti-né*, a manuscript he received from an Italian homosexual and which Saint-Paul includes as a testimonial in his medical study:

J’étais alors aux heures les plus rudes de ma bataille littéraire, la critique me traitait journallement en criminel, capable de tous les vices et de toutes les débauches; et me voyez-vous me faire, à cette époque, l’éditeur responsable de ce « Roman d’un inverti »? D’abord, on m’aurait accusé d’avoir inventé l’histoire de toutes pièces, par corruption personnelle. Ensuite, j’aurais été dûment condamné pour n’avoir vu, dans l’affaire, qu’une spéculation basse sur les plus répugnants instincts. Et quelle clameur, si je m’étais permis de dire qu’aucun sujet n’est plus

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<sup>47</sup> Copley 146.

<sup>48</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 8 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 216.

sérieux ni plus triste, qu'il y a là une plaie beaucoup plus fréquente et profonde qu'on n'affecte de le croire, et que le mieux, pour guérir les plaies, est encore de les étudier, de les montrer et de les soigner!<sup>49</sup>

Zola underscores the genre of text in which such a manuscript as the *Roman d'un inverti-né* can be published: a novelist, especially a naturalist author who is at the constant mercy of criticism, cannot convince his readers of a serious concern in a medical condition, but Saint-Paul as a medical expert on the subject will not be accused of scandal if he publishes this confession. In the very first lines of his preface, Zola makes the distinction between Saint-Paul, the "savant"<sup>50</sup> and himself the "simple écrivain."<sup>51</sup> As a matter of fact, Jean-Paul Aron and Roger Kempf claim that a doctor can write on homosexuality as a guide to social morals while "For a writer to talk about homosexuality would mean taking on himself something no one would risk assuming in a strictly moralistic society."<sup>52</sup> Ellis and Symonds also claim that if "a man of undoubted genius has his name associated with this perversion [male homosexuality] it becomes difficult or impossible for the admirers of his work to associate with him personally."<sup>53</sup> For instance, "neither Alphonse Daudet, Jules Renard, Anatole France, Edmond de Goncourt, Pierre Louÿs,

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<sup>49</sup> Emile Zola, Préface, *Tares et poisons, perversion & perversités sexuelles*, ed. Georges Saint-Paul (Paris, 1896) 2.

<sup>50</sup> Zola, *Préface* 1.

<sup>51</sup> Zola, *Préface* 1.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Paul Aron and Roger Kempf, "Triumphs and Tribulations of the Homosexual Desire," *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. G. Stambolian and E. Marks (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979) 146.

<sup>53</sup> Ellis and Symonds 154.

nor Emile Zola”<sup>54</sup> would sign the petition in Oscar Wilde’s defense circulating in France. Moreover, Saint-Paul does not believe that Zola did not write on homosexuality because he feared criticism, but that “il ne connut la question qu’assez tard, je veux dire à une époque où, lancé dans des travaux dont la série était harmonieusement classée dans son esprit, il ne se souciait pas d’interrompre ses études pour entreprendre des recherches infiniment délicates et compliquées.”<sup>55</sup> In the aforementioned letter of May 1895 to Saint-Paul, Zola warns his friend that he does not want to benefit materially from the publication of the *Roman d’un inverti* and that “pour des motifs d’ordre littéraire, je désire que mon nom ne figure pas sur la couverture.”<sup>56</sup> The editors of Zola’s correspondence claim that the “motifs littéraires” preventing the naturalist author from giving his opinion openly are mainly his candidacy to the *Académie française*.

Moreover, in the above-mentioned quotation, Zola compares male homosexuality to a revolting instinct and to a serious sickness and thus emphasizes its occurrence in the animal sphere of the human. In this preface, Zola mentions a second confidential letter from a “malheureux [qui] m’avait envoyé le cri le plus poignant de douleur humaine,”<sup>57</sup> a young man suffering from “amours abominables”<sup>58</sup> as if possessed by the demon, by darker and devilish forces and passions. Zola claims that there is nothing more tragic than male homosexuality: “un

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<sup>54</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990) 172.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Saint-Paul, “A la mémoire d’Emile Zola,” *Archives d’anthropologie criminelle* 168 (1907): 834.

<sup>56</sup> Zola, *Correspondance* vol. 8. 216.

<sup>57</sup> Zola, *Préface* 2.

<sup>58</sup> Zola, *Préface* 2.

véritable cas physiologique, [...] une hésitation, [...] une demi-erreur de la nature.”<sup>59</sup> Zola then shifts his stance and discusses both male and female homosexuality:

Mais quelle complication d’obscurité et de misère, si la nature a un moment d’incertitude, si le garçon naît à moitié fille, si la fille naît à moitié garçon ! Les faits sont là, quotidiens. L’incertitude peut commencer au simple aspect physique, aux grandes lignes du caractère : l’homme efféminé, délicat, lâche ; la femme masculine, violente, sans tendresse. Et elle va jusqu’à la monstruosité constatée, l’hermaphrodisme des organes, les sentiments et les passions contre nature.<sup>60</sup>

Nature is partially responsible since it made a mistake in allowing such a behavior in humans. The naturalist author denounces homosexual passions as being against Nature and suggests that they do not occur in the animal world. Furthermore, Zola mentions the moral aspect of the issue:

Certes, la morale et la justice ont raison d’intervenir, puisqu’elles ont la garde de la paix publique. Mais de quel droit pourtant, si la volonté est en partie abolie ? On ne condamne pas un bossu de naissance, parce qu’il est bossu. Pourquoi mépriser un homme d’agir en femme, s’il est né femme à demi ?<sup>61</sup>

Like Foucault, Zola links such an anti-natural behavior to the notion of lawlessness: “Doubtless acts “contrary to nature” were stamped as especially abominable, but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts “against the law”; they were infringements of decrees which were just

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<sup>59</sup> Zola, *Préface* 3.

<sup>60</sup> Zola, *Préface* 3.

<sup>61</sup> Zola, *Préface* 3.

as sacred as those of marriage, and which had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings.”<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Zola wonders whether the condemnation of homosexuality is legitimate since humans do not have control over their sexual orientation.

Finally, in the last paragraph of his preface, Zola offers a contradictory conclusion. On the one hand, he hopes for pity and fairness for these poor souls, “Because the roots of this type of homosexuality are thus biological rather than cultural, tolerance is called for.”<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, he finishes by linking sex to social life and by condemning homosexuality as disorganizing the concepts of family and of nation: “Un inverti est un désorganisateur de la famille, de la nation, de l’humanité. L’homme et la femme ne sont certainement ici-bas que pour faire des enfants, et ils tuent la vie le jour où ils ne font plus ce qu’il faut pour en faire.”<sup>64</sup> It is important to stress the stylistic precautions taken by Zola: he does not use an affirmative construction, such as stating directly that men and women are on earth to reproduce, but in using the *ne...que* negative construction, his argument becomes an exception to a general statement. François Porché notices that “il [Zola] termine ainsi, sans s’apercevoir qu’il démolit en un tournemain tout ce qu’il vient de dire, et fournit, en fin de compte, des arguments à la dureté.”<sup>65</sup> Zola not only argues that homosexuality is an innate and natural disease but he also recognizes that Nature hesitates and is thus imperfect in its gender differentiation. In praising fecundity as the only prerequisite for natural sexual relations, he automatically excludes any other types of sexual relations as

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 38.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Rivers, “Improbable Prescience: Emile Zola and the Origins of Homosexuality,” *Excavatio* 14.1-2 (2001): 52.

<sup>64</sup> Zola, *Préface* 4.

<sup>65</sup> François Porché, *L’amour qui n’ose pas dire son nom* (Paris: Grasset, 1927) 23.

unnatural forms. In an article entitled “Dépopulation,” Zola deploras debauchery because of its “extraordinaire gaspillage de la semence, le meilleur de la graine humaine jetée au vent.”<sup>66</sup> He then praises fecundity and encourages his French fellows to have more children, in spite of the fact that families having numerous children look comical since “Il n’y a que les animaux pour se reproduire de la sorte.”<sup>67</sup> French society of the second half of the nineteenth century felt threatened by homosexuality: “the unusual concerns about depopulation and infertility encouraged the development of a medical prophylaxis that stressed the connections between normal sexuality, traditional family life, and national survival.”<sup>68</sup> In short, Zola views homosexuality as both “against the regularity of a natural function”<sup>69</sup> and against “the legislation (or morality) pertaining to marriage and the family.”<sup>70</sup> Zola perceives reproduction as natural and as animal; he deduces from this claim that homosexuality is unnatural, thus implying that animals do not even experience homosexuality. Yet this argumentation can be easily overturned since natural beings such as animals were already known at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to exhibit homosexual behaviors.

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<sup>66</sup> Emile Zola, “Dépopulation,” *La vérité en marche suivi de nouvelle campagne* (Paris: Bernouard, 1928) 116.

<sup>67</sup> Zola, *Dépopulation* 116.

<sup>68</sup> Robert A. Nye, “Sex difference and male homosexuality in French medical discourse, 1830-1930,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 63 (1989): 50.

<sup>69</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 39.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 39.

### 5.3. Homosexuality in Animals

As discussed above, the notion of Nature and of animal homosexuality is crucial in Saint-Paul's and Zola's stance toward homosexuality. The former mentions that male homosexuality is also characteristic of the animal species: homosexuality "se présente dans tous les troupeaux de mâles [...]"<sup>71</sup> but the latter does not seem to be aware of the existence of homosexuality in animals in the above-discussed preface. In *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* published in 1999, Bruce Bagemihl shows that hardly any species is truly monogamous and completely heterosexual. The author spent ten years researching zoological studies dating back two centuries, in which he found a variety of behavior patterns. Bagemihl claims that animals have been homosexual for millions of years and this in more than 450 different kinds of animals worldwide. Homosexual activity occurs in five behavioral categories: courtship, affection, sex, pair-bonding and parenting. Bagemihl compares male to female animal homosexuality and claims that the former is only slightly more frequent than the latter. It is clear that bisexuality is more common than exclusive homosexuality in animals, but the latter is definitely not exclusively related to humans: "Animals, like people, have complex life histories that involve a wide spectrum of sexual orientations, with many different degrees of participation in both same- and opposite-sex activities."<sup>72</sup> Contrary to their human counterparts, homosexual animals seem more integrated in their environments: "it is striking that both active hostility toward individuals involved in homosexuality and segregation of such individuals are rare occurrences in the animal kingdom."<sup>73</sup> Bagemihl also claims that "homosexuality is part of our

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<sup>71</sup> Saint-Paul, *Tares* 17.

<sup>72</sup> Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin, 1999) 53.

<sup>73</sup> Bagemihl 59.



evolutionary heritage as primates: anyone looking at the prevalence and elaboration of homosexual behavior among our closest relatives in the animal kingdom will be led, eventually, to this conclusion.”<sup>74</sup>

Bagemihl criticizes the generally accepted view according to which homosexuality, which is considered natural in animals, is thus acceptable in humans. He rejects the reasoning behind the equation “*occurs in animals=natural=acceptable in humans.*” Yet the criterion of unnaturalness has been used in different ways in history to legitimize approval or refusal of homosexuality. Plato refers to animals to argue that homosexuality is against Nature: he claims that animals should be models to humans since animals only couple to reproduce themselves. It is precisely this type of rhetoric that Zola uses to condemn homosexuality. When specialists in animal behavior established that animals also have homosexual relations, Plato’s argument was reversed and used “pour rabaisser l’homosexualité au rang d’une activité bestiale.”<sup>75</sup> Nazism sanctioned homosexuality because it was believed to originate from animals’ uncontrollable instincts while in ancient Greek society, “same-sex love was thought to be purer than opposite-sex love because it did not involve procreation or “animal-like” passions.”<sup>76</sup> The argument of homosexuality as natural/unnatural can be paralleled to the natural-animalistic metaphor: “When animals do something that we like, we call it natural. When they do something that we don’t like, we call it animalistic.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Bagemihl 64.

<sup>75</sup> Fernandez 14.

<sup>76</sup> Bagemihl 77.

<sup>77</sup> James D. Weinrich, “Is Homosexuality Biologically Natural?” *Homosexuality: Social, Psychological and Biological Issues*, ed. William Paul et al. (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982) 203.

Bagemihl also introduces the history of the study of animal homosexuality. Animal homosexuality was noticed in ancient Greece, but scientific studies of the phenomenon only appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon was the earliest scientist to observe homosexuality in birds. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scientists proposed descriptions of same-sex behavior in insects, small mammals and birds. All these studies underline the astonishment caused by this phenomenon. Although the study of animal homosexuality started two hundred years ago and is still expanding, Bagemihl notes that animal homosexuality is not always mentioned when it should be and that some scientists are judgmental. He even goes further in claiming that “scientists (who are often heterosexual) frequently project, consciously or unconsciously, society’s negative attitudes toward homosexuality onto their subject matter”<sup>78</sup> and that “the treatment of animal homosexuality in the scientific discourse has closely paralleled the discussion of human homosexuality in society at large.”<sup>79</sup> Derogatory terms, such as ‘deviant,’ ‘unnatural,’ ‘bizarre,’ ‘aberrant,’ and ‘perverse,’ have been used and are still used to refer to animal homosexuality. Thus today’s scientific discourse on animal homosexuality seems to be a century delayed and to be at the same stage as that on human homosexuality in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As I have shown, scientific discourses on animal homosexuality such as the one proposed by Bagemihl can easily undo the rhetoric Zola uses in the conclusion of his preface to Saint-Paul’s *Tares et poisons: perversion et perversité sexuelles*. Indeed Bagemihl would contradict Zola’s stance on the unnatural as non-reproductive aspect of homosexuality in arguing that “Animal social organization and biology do

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<sup>78</sup> Bagemihl 88.

<sup>79</sup> Bagemihl 89.

not revolve exclusively around reproduction and, in many cases, appear to be designed specifically to *prevent* procreation.”<sup>80</sup>

#### **5.4. Zola’s Depiction of the Homosexual Baptiste in *La Curée***

As in his preface to *Tares et poisons: perversion et perversité sexuelles*, in which he compares homosexuality to a repulsive instinct, Zola portrays the only male homosexual character in *La curée* as a repugnant human being. We have seen that, in his description of the society of the second Empire in *La curée*, Zola uses corruption and immorality as metaphors for a rotting society that denatures man. Homosexuality is a “dirty” topic that makes Renée and Maxime laugh: the two of them have devised a guessing game that involves an album, full of photographs of their male and female acquaintances. Opening the album at random tells them the name of their future sexual partner. The narrator underlines that “on ne riait jamais autant que lorsque le sort accouplait deux hommes ou deux femmes ensemble.”<sup>81</sup>

The servant Baptiste troubles Renée because he is not attracted to women. He is depicted as a beautiful human being: “Cet homme était superbe, tout de noir habillé, grand, fort, la face blanche, avec les favoris corrects d’un diplomate anglais, l’air grave et digne d’un magistrat.” He is the only one to remain sober and without sexual desires at a lavish party: “Lui seul, dans l’air chargé d’ivresse, sous les clartés crues du lustre qui jaunissaient, restait correct, avec sa chaîne d’argent au cou, ses yeux froids où la vue des épaules des femmes ne mettait pas une flamme,

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<sup>80</sup> Bagemihl 211.

<sup>81</sup> Emile Zola, *La curée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 155.

son air d'eunuque servant des Parisiens de la décadence et gardant sa dignité.”<sup>82</sup> The servant appears as an eunuch, as a sexless or neutral being who does not exhibit a typically virile behavior. Baptiste worries Renée who does not know whether he is aware of her incestuous relationship with Maxime or whether he is the sole respectful and honest being left in her environment. Renée then questions her chambermaid Céleste who explains his strange behavior toward women: “Eh! il ne regarde jamais les femmes. C’est à peine si nous l’apercevons... Il est toujours chez monsieur ou dans les écuries. Il dit qu’il aime beaucoup les chevaux.”<sup>83</sup> Near the end of the novel, Renée’s chambermaid Céleste has a word about Baptiste’s questionable attitude toward women in Renée’s ear. Yet this information is censored by the narrator: the story must be titillating because it makes Renée blush. Céleste only gives the following information: “Quand le nouveau garçon d’écurie, continua-t-elle, eut tout appris à monsieur, monsieur préféra chasser Baptiste que de l’envoyer en justice. Il paraît que ces vilaines choses se passaient depuis des années dans les écuries... Et dire que ce grand escogriffe avait l’air d’aimer les chevaux! C’était les palefreniers qu’il aimait.”<sup>84</sup> Baptiste’s proximity to horses and their caretakers is interesting in terms of the human-animal border and of sexual perversion: the horse symbolizes instinctive and darker impulses. Zola links male homosexuality to baser instincts of the human as animal. At the end of the novel, while wandering in the Bois, Renée is said to feel “un dégoût”<sup>85</sup> in encountering Baptiste, now in the service of the baron Gouraud. The naturalist narrator transposes his own opinion of homosexuality to the fictional character Renée who finds male

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<sup>82</sup> Zola, *Curée* 70.

<sup>83</sup> Zola, *Curée* 244.

<sup>84</sup> Zola, *Curée* 330.

<sup>85</sup> Zola, *Curée* 333.

homosexuality repulsive. Saint-Paul underscores Zola's personal disgust toward homosexuals: "La vue et surtout le contact des invertis étaient désagréables à Zola. « J'en ai rencontré dans le monde, me dit-il un jour, et j'éprouve à leur serrer la main une répulsion instinctive que j'ai quelque peine à dominer »."<sup>86</sup> In mentioning the limit of his affective nature, he recognizes his own imperfections as a rational being. Nigel Smith interprets this feeling of repulsion in nineteenth century discourses on homosexuality as "imprint of desire" and as "an incongruous alliance of anathema and attraction."<sup>87</sup> It is clear that homosexuality is intriguing to medical experts and to Zola, mainly because this topic was still under study and was not fully comprehended.

### **5.5. Zola's Preface to a Contemporary Lesbian Novel**

In 1870 Adolphe Belot published a popular novel about lesbianism entitled *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme*. It is a story told by Adrien de C., an unhappy husband, whose wife Paule Giraud refuses to consummate their marriage and insists on remaining a virgin. After intense efforts in unraveling this mystery, Adrien de C. discovers that his wife spends her time with Berthe de Blangy, her intimate friend since the convent. Then Adrien de C. and M. de Blangy plan to separate their wives and to travel to areas remote from each other. Yet Berthe does not abandon her friend so easily, and she makes a long trip to join Paule. After his wife dies of an incurable disease, Adrien finds himself on the same beach as Berthe, and takes his revenge on her. Berthe is carried along by the strong current; Adrien goes to her rescue, and instead of

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<sup>86</sup> Saint-Paul, *Mémoire* 833.

<sup>87</sup> Smith 85.

saving her life, he drowns her. The novel ends on M. de Blangy's note to Adrien, thanking him for taking care of the reptile that was Berthe. Thus the lesbian is compared to a cold-blooded and diabolical animal, like the snake, which symbolizes the darker instincts of femininity.

Christopher Rivers explains how *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* differs from traditional norms of the nineteenth-century popular novel. The popular novel usually has working class members as models for heroes, but the lesbians depicted in *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* come from the upper classes. Rivers thus argues that "the revelation of the story [...] is less the existence of lesbianism as a human phenomenon than as a possibility among bourgeois and aristocratic women (as opposed to, for example, prostitutes)."<sup>88</sup> As a matter of fact, the narrator Adrien de C. expresses astonishment at the existence of vice in the upper classes: "j'avais cru de bonne foi que la naissance et l'éducation avaient élevé une barrière infranchissable entre certaines classes de la société et de telles misères."<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, according to Rivers, Zola made Belot's acquaintance in 1864-1865 after which date they maintained professional connections. Zola reviewed one of Belot's novels while Belot helped Zola have *Thérèse Raquin* performed on stage. It is revealing that Zola wrote the preface to Belot's novel to acclaim this "acte d'honnêteté et de courage,"<sup>90</sup> under the transparent pseudonym *Thérèse Raquin*, a gender-crossing similar to Flaubert's famous claim "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." Zola starts his preface by analyzing the novel's popular success and shows that the readers' expectations are opposed to Belot's objectives: "La foule a cru trouver la pâture

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<sup>88</sup> Christopher Rivers, Introduction, *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme*, ed. Christopher Rivers, Texts and Translations, Texts 11 (New York: MLA, 2002) xxx.

<sup>89</sup> Adolphe Belot, *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme* (Paris, 1879) 199.

<sup>90</sup> Emile Zola, "Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme d'Adolphe Belot," *Mélanges: Préfaces et Discours* (Paris: Bernouard, 1929) 188.

à ses curiosités malsaines. [...] [P]endant qu'elle dévorait ces pages si saines et si fortes qu'elle tentait vainement de salir par ses appétits de scandale, elle allait déclarer tout haut que cette oeuvre était une honte [...].”<sup>91</sup> Immorality and obscenity thus seem to be the reasons for the success of the novel, but Zola stresses the moral perspective: Belot is a “moraliste qui a mis avec un grand courage le doigt sur une des plaies de l'éducation des jeunes filles dans les couvents [...]”<sup>92</sup> At the end of the novel, Paule proposes maternal home schooling instead of convent education. In the latter, she was dominated and influenced by Berthe, an older and more experienced pupil, who made her lose her innocence. Paule concludes that the convent was the ruin of her and that “ce ne sont pas les hommes qui perdent les femmes; ce sont les femmes qui se perdent entre elles.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, in *La Cloche* of February 1870, Zola published an article on a “plaie sociale,”<sup>94</sup> the dangers of convent education for young girls. He compares two young girls' educations: Jeanne becomes curious and depraved as a result of attending the convent while Lucie is learned and sexually innocent after growing up “en plein luxe, en pleine liberté [...] au milieu de cet appartement aristocratique.”<sup>95</sup> A young girl's task is to remain virgin and ignorant until her wedding; otherwise she exhibits “une âme salie, un esprit défloré.”<sup>96</sup> Zola concludes that “Toute association cloîtrée de personnes d'un même sexe est mauvaise pour la

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<sup>91</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 185.

<sup>92</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 186.

<sup>93</sup> Belot 242.

<sup>94</sup> Emile Zola, “Au couvent,” *L'atelier de Zola: textes de journaux 1865-1870*, ed. Martin Kanes (Genève: Droz, 1963) 220.

<sup>95</sup> Zola, *Couvent* 219.

<sup>96</sup> Zola, *Couvent* 221.

morale”<sup>97</sup> and that “Une mère, à tout prix, doit garder sa fille auprès d’elle.”<sup>98</sup> Yet it is only in 1882 that “a law was passed that established once and for all in France a universal system of free, public, obligatory, secular education for both sexes.”<sup>99</sup>

In the preface, Zola also implies that female homosexuality is known but that it is usually not discussed: “M. Belot n’a rien appris à personne, n’a troublé aucune innocence, en racontant la liaison monstrueuse de deux anciennes amies de couvent. Cette histoire-là court notre société gâtée jusqu’aux moelles. Le crime de l’auteur est simplement d’avoir troublé la quiétude des gens qui préféraient se raconter l’histoire en question entre deux portes [...]”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Rivers notices the homophobic attitude toward lesbianism not only in the novel but also in Zola’s preface in the sense that men seem to be united against female homosexuality. As a matter of fact, Zola addresses his preface to male readers, especially fathers: “Cessez de cacher son livre et mettez-le sur toutes vos tables, comme nos pères y mettaient les verges dont ils fouettaient leurs enfants. Et, si vous avez des filles, que votre femme lise ce livre avant de se séparer de ces chères créatures et de les envoyer au couvent.”<sup>101</sup> It is also from a husband’s perspective that he describes the dangers of lesbianism: “L’orgie antique a passé là, la lèpre de Lesbos a gagné nos épouses.”<sup>102</sup> These two quotations illustrate Rivers’ claim that “Lesbianism is thus, in both Belot’s novel and Zola’s preface, a subject to be discussed, and a social problem to be solved, by

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<sup>97</sup> Zola, *Couvent* 220-21.

<sup>98</sup> Zola, *Couvent* 222.

<sup>99</sup> Rivers, *Introduction* xix.

<sup>100</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 186.

<sup>101</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 186-87.

<sup>102</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 187.



men.”<sup>103</sup> Finally, Zola concludes by comparing Belot to a judge condemning the lesbian crime occurring in convents:

Il a le ton froid et clair du juge qui descend dans les monstruosités humaines et qui applique en honnête homme les éternelles lois du châtement. Tout le monde peut le lire. C’est le procès-verbal d’un crime, c’est une audience de Cour d’assises, pendant laquelle toute la fange de notre société est étalée avec une telle sévérité de parole que personne ne songe à rougir. Et la morale du livre est aveuglante.<sup>104</sup>

Contrary to his preface on male homosexuality, Zola seems less troubled by lesbianism which he considers a social issue that can be solved after a reform of the education system. In the preface to Saint-Paul’s study of sexual inversion, Zola views homosexuality as a condition for which man and woman cannot be held responsible: Nature unmade the feminine man and the virile woman and inverts can only cause pity and compassion. Yet at the same time Zola harshly criticizes such repulsive and unnatural instincts, which are in opposition to the institution of marriage and the notion of family. Rivers cautions against a comparison of Zola’s two prefaces to homosexuality: he argues that only “*tendenciers*, rules to which there are numerous and significant exceptions”<sup>105</sup> can be deduced from such an evaluation. On the one hand Zola shows that lesbianism is a social evil but on the other he claims that both men and women can be prone to innate homosexuality.

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<sup>103</sup> Rivers, *Introduction* xviii.

<sup>104</sup> Zola, *Préface Belot* 188.

<sup>105</sup> Rivers, *Prescience* 54.

## 5.6. Zola's Depictions of the Two Lesbians in *La Curée*

In *La curée*, Zola depicts female homosexuality in Adeline d'Espagnet and Suzanne Haffner, two minor characters. Mme la marquise d'Espagnet and Mme Haffner are “les deux inséparables,”<sup>106</sup> two intimate friends Renée has known since the convent and whom she meets in the Bois: “elle salua deux jeunes femmes couchées côte à côte, avec une langueur amoureuse, dans un huit-ressorts qui quittait à grands fracas le bord du lac pour s'éloigner par une allée latérale.”<sup>107</sup> It is surprising that Zola uses the term *lesbienne* in *La curée* not to designate the two inseparable female friends but to speak metaphorically of the fashion designer's customers waiting their turn in his anteroom: “on aurait dit un vol blanc de lesbiennes qui se serait abattu sur les divans d'un salon parisien.”<sup>108</sup> This substantive can either be the newly coined word<sup>109</sup> since Zola started to write *La curée* supposedly in 1869, or rather a reference to the island of Lesbos, homeland of Sappho. In any case, this accumulation of female bodies is compared to white birds, apparently symbolizing purity and innocence.

Renée mentions to Maxime that nasty stories circulate on the two inseparable female friends but without giving more details. Their love relationship is implied rather than explicitly described, for example in the mention of Adeline's jealousy if Maxime were to impregnate Suzanne. At the representation of the poem entitled *Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo*, la marquise d'Espagnet and Mme Haffner play the role of two lesbians: “enveloppées du même flot de dentelles, les bras à la taille, les cheveux mêlés, [elles] mettaient un coin risqué

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<sup>106</sup> Zola, *Curée* 43.

<sup>107</sup> Zola, *Curée* 43.

<sup>108</sup> Zola, *Curée* 138.

<sup>109</sup> According to Roddey Reid, the French term *lesbien* entered the language in 1867 while the term *homosexuel* only appeared in 1907.

dans le tableau, un souvenir de Lesbos.”<sup>110</sup> Adeline and Suzanne are lovers not only in their theatrical roles but also at the costume ball: “M<sup>me</sup> d’Espanet, devant l’orchestre, avait réussi à saisir M<sup>me</sup> Haffner au passage, et valsait avec elle, sans vouloir la lâcher. L’Or et l’Argent dansaient ensemble, amoureusement.”<sup>111</sup> At the end of *La curée*, Renée sees the two lesbians in their vehicle wandering in the Bois: “Renée aperçut [...] la marquise d’Espanet et Mme Haffner, les inséparables, cachées sous leurs ombrelles, qui riaient tendrement, les yeux dans les yeux, étendues côte à côte.”<sup>112</sup> It is important to note that this description is similar to the one proposed at the beginning of the novel. Thus the narrator’s attitude towards the inseparable friends does not change over the course of the novel. Renée seems amused by the lesbian couple displaying a frolicking behavior but she is disturbed by the presence of the homosexual servant Baptiste: “The lesbian relationship of Suzanne Haffner and Adeline d’Espanet appeals to Renée because it suggests sympathy; while she [...] finds male homosexuality undesirable because it is impenetrable and unassailable for her as a woman.”<sup>113</sup>

## 5.7. Nana as Satin’s Lover

In this section, I will analyze Nana’s lesbian relation with Satin. Claude Summers remarks that 19<sup>th</sup> century works on lesbianism were mostly written by men and they were “often

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<sup>110</sup> Zola, *Curée* 279.

<sup>111</sup> Zola, *Curée* 317.

<sup>112</sup> Zola, *Curée* 333.

<sup>113</sup> Nicholas Colcord Dobelbower, “The criminal Type: the Articulations of Criminality and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France,” Diss., Duke U, 2001, 260.

condemnatory or moralizing, but this did not prevent them from also being titillating, even pornographic.”<sup>114</sup> In *Nana*, Zola does not use the lesbian subplot as a cautionary tale: he is far from the type of discourse on social evil he gave in the preface to *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma femme*. Schor claims that Nana’s lesbianism has been “underestimated, misdiagnosed as little more than a symptom of decadence”<sup>115</sup> and that “To fail to measure the depth not only of Nana’s contempt for men but also of her love for women is to overlook the open war between men and women.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, lesbianism in *Nana* not only symbolizes a female revenge against men but it is also a magnetic force attracting readers. Nana herself recognizes the value of a good novel: “comme si un roman ne devait pas être écrit pour passer une heure agréable.”<sup>117</sup> The mere mention of the lesbian meeting place *Chez Laure* renders men “égayés, allumés;”<sup>118</sup> it can be argued that the reading of a novel such as *Nana* has as much effect as the mention of *Chez Laure* on men. The novel was published in 1880 in 149 000 copies, which is the highest number of copies for a Zolian novel.<sup>119</sup>

It has been shown that female prostitutes were often also lesbian in the nineteenth century. Ellis and Symonds give the following as the main cause for this phenomenon: “these relations [with men] are of a professional character, and as the business element becomes

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<sup>114</sup> Claude J. Summers, *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* (New York: Holt, 1995) 296.

<sup>115</sup> Naomi Schor, *Zola’s Crowds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978) 91.

<sup>116</sup> Schor, *Zola’s Crowds* 91.

<sup>117</sup> Emile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002) 339.

<sup>118</sup> Zola, *Nana* 92.

<sup>119</sup> Colette Becker, Gina Gourdin-Servenière, and Véronique Lavielle, *Dictionnaire d’Emile Zola* (Paris: Laffont, 1993) 425.

emphasized the possibility of sexual satisfaction diminishes.”<sup>120</sup> Besides a lack of sexual satisfaction, prostitutes needed other types of sexual behaviors to feel fulfillment: “In one widely accepted theory, the lesbianism of female prostitutes was but one of the sexual perversities resulting from their “satiation” with “normal” sex.”<sup>121</sup>

Satin is Nana’s friend since childhood; her name referring to a specific type of fabric suggests softness and smoothness. Although she is a “rouleuse du boulevard,”<sup>122</sup> her figure resembling that of a virgin is constantly stressed: “Sous les frisures naturelles de ses beaux cheveux cendrés, elle avait une figure de vierge, aux yeux de velours, doux et candides.”<sup>123</sup> Satin introduces Nana to a lesbian restaurant, *Chez Laure*, where guests eat meals similar to those in a hôtel de province and where there are only ten to fifteen men, “venus pour voir ça,”<sup>124</sup> for a hundred women. Women line up and “baisaient Laure sur la bouche, avec une familiarité tendre.”<sup>125</sup> At first, Nana is rather surprised by this group of women flirting: “Nana fit une moue dégoûtée. Elle ne comprenait pas encore ça. Pourtant, elle disait, de sa voix raisonnable, que des goûts et des couleurs il ne fallait pas disputer, car on ne savait jamais ce qu’on pourrait aimer un jour.”<sup>126</sup> Nana often goes to *Chez Laure* but she is afraid to start a lesbian relationship. Satin tells her more about her lesbian encounters and Nana is “stupéfiée d’en apprendre encore à son âge,

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<sup>120</sup> Ellis and Symonds 102.

<sup>121</sup> Chauncey 135-36.

<sup>122</sup> Zola, *Nana* 46.

<sup>123</sup> Zola, *Nana* 45.

<sup>124</sup> Zola, *Nana* 260.

<sup>125</sup> Zola, *Nana* 260.

<sup>126</sup> Zola, *Nana* 261.

après tout ce qu'elle savait."<sup>127</sup> After settling down with the actor Fontan, Nana spends more time with Satin to whom she complains about her lover's abuses: "Toutes les conversations aboutissaient à la saleté des hommes."<sup>128</sup> Yet when Fontan throws her out, Nana finds comfort with Satin in a hotel room. Satin calls her "ma petite chérie" and Nana "rendait à Satin ses caresses. Lorsque deux heures sonnèrent, la bougie brûlait encore; toutes deux avaient de légers rires étouffés, avec des paroles d'amour."<sup>129</sup> Yet this tender frolicking between Nana and Satin is interrupted by the police who put Satin in prison at Saint-Lazare. Nana and Satin resume their relationship when Nana is at her apogee and when she lives in a luxurious hotel paid for by the Comte Muffat. The narrator underlines that their relation becomes sexual by claiming in a euphemism that "un beau soir, ça devint sérieux."<sup>130</sup> Nana becomes jealous of her rival Mme Robert who courts Satin. In the end, Nana wins Satin over after lavishing her with presents, and Mme Robert takes her revenge on Nana by writing abominable anonymous letters to her lovers. Yet Nana starts to cheat on Satin not only with her male suitors but also with girls she meets in the street and at debauchery parties. Nana's behavior irritates Satin who finishes "par prendre un empire absolu sur Nana"<sup>131</sup> after making some atrocious scenes.

It is when they are surrounded by men at the table that Nana and Satin speak of their low-class origins: "c'était toujours quand il y avait là des hommes, comme si elles cédaient à une rage

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<sup>127</sup> Zola, *Nana* 272.

<sup>128</sup> Zola, *Nana* 257.

<sup>129</sup> Zola, *Nana* 282.

<sup>130</sup> Zola, *Nana* 329.

<sup>131</sup> Zola, *Nana* 437.

de leur imposer le fumier où elles avaient grandi.”<sup>132</sup> Both Nana and Satin are in a position of superiority over men whom they despise openly. Men are jealous of their flirting behaviors, as when Satin shares a piece of pear with Nana and “elle le lui présenta entre les dents; et toutes deux se mordillaient les lèvres, achevaient le fruit dans un baiser.”<sup>133</sup> In this scene, Nana and Satin form a feminine alliance against men and “C’est précisément pour les humilier que Nana leur impose son aventure avec Satin.”<sup>134</sup> When Satin dies of a sexual disease transmitted by Mme Robert, Nana mourns this loss saying that “Personne ne m’a aimée comme elle.”<sup>135</sup>

Contrary to *La curée*, in which “the Sapphism of Renée’s friends is always related indirectly”<sup>136</sup> and in which “the reader never witness[es] their actions,”<sup>137</sup> the lesbian passion in Nana “is made the subject of definite episodes.”<sup>138</sup> However, there is a marked difference in the way Zola depicts Nana’s sexual relations with men and her relations with Satin: “Zola gives more details of Nana’s goings-on with her men friends, presenting her adventures with them in an even more vividly shocking manner than her experiences with Satin.”<sup>139</sup> It is noteworthy that no animal terms appear in the description of Nana and Satin’s lesbian relationship, probably

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<sup>132</sup> Zola, *Nana* 335.

<sup>133</sup> Zola, *Nana* 337.

<sup>134</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, “Lecture idéologique de *Nana*,” *Mosaic* 10 (1977): 54.

<sup>135</sup> Zola, *Nana* 456.

<sup>136</sup> John C. Lapp, “The Watchers Betrayed and the Fatal Woman: Some Recurring Patterns in Zola,” *PMLA* 74 (1959): 283.

<sup>137</sup> Lapp 283.

<sup>138</sup> Lapp 283.

<sup>139</sup> Karl Rosen, “Emile Zola and Homosexuality,” *Excavatio* 2 (1993): 112.

because the naturalist author does not give enough details about their sexual demeanors. In any case it is surprising that Zola does not animalize Nana and Satin as lesbians in any way.

### **5.8. Conclusion: Male-Female Homosexuality versus Medical-Literary Discourse**

As discussed above, medical and literary discourses differ in their perception of male and female homosexuality. As far as medical discourse is concerned, Saint-Paul is surprised by the tolerance toward lesbianism and explains this unfair treatment as follows:

Nous jugeons sexuellement, c'est-à-dire avec indulgence, le lesbisme, comme des femmes pourraient, sexuellement et avec une égale indulgence, juger la pédérastie. [Pour] les hommes dirigeant et gouvernant l'Etat, le lesbisme paraît chose naturelle, la pédérastie coupable. C'est là une faute d'observation et de sens commun; lesbisme et pédérastie se valent et sont également condamnables.<sup>140</sup>

Ellis and Symonds give the following reasons for the small proportion of recorded cases of sexual inversion in women:

Notwithstanding the severity with which homosexuality in women has been visited in a few cases, for the most part men seem to have been indifferent towards it; when it has been made a crime or a cause for divorce in men, it has usually been considered as no offence at all in women. Another reason is that it is less easy to detect in women; we are accustomed to a much greater familiarity and intimacy between women than between men, and we are less apt to suspect the

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<sup>140</sup> Saint-Paul, *Tares* 358.



existence of any abnormal passion. And allied with this cause we have also to bear in mind the extreme ignorance and the extreme reticence of women regarding any abnormal or even normal manifestation of their sexual life.<sup>141</sup>

Chevalier also notices that a majority of medical observations on homosexuality are related to men rather than women, because the latter can “plus facilement cacher ou réprimer leurs impulsions instinctives.”<sup>142</sup>

A totally opposed tendency appears in novels, in which female homosexuality is more often portrayed than its male counterpart. Chevalier remarks that the higher incidence of female homosexuality in novels does not mean that it is more frequent in reality than its male counterpart:

Nous pensons qu’il faut plutôt en chercher la raison dans l’idée relative qu’ils [les romanciers] se faisaient de la perversion chez la femme vis-à-vis de la perversion chez l’homme. Il est évident qu’ils se sont fait une opinion bien moins laide de la première que de la seconde. [...] La pédérastie a eu certainement pour eux un caractère odieux que n’avait pas le tribadisme; ainsi s’explique leur dégoût pour l’une et leur prédilection pour l’autre, comme si une aberration identique peut admettre des degrés d’immoralité, comme si le sexe crée la vie et la honte.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ellis and Symonds 79-80.

<sup>142</sup> Chevalier, *De l’inversion* 87. Charcot and Magnan mention the same point in “Inversion du sens génital” (303).

<sup>143</sup> Chevalier, *De l’inversion* 70-71.

Rivers underlines the same outcome: “Lesbianism appears to have been considered safe to represent in novels, unlike male homosexuality, which, as a genuine taboo, is nearly completely absent from mainstream French literature written before 1900.”<sup>144</sup> For instance, Saint-Paul includes an autobiographical account of homosexuality, which an Italian invert wrote and addressed to Zola, in his medical treatise, but he had explicit sexual scenes between the Italian invert and his partners appear in Latin. The Italian confessing his homosexual tendency describes Zola as “le plus grand romancier de notre temps”<sup>145</sup> who portrays “*tous les travers, toutes les hontes, toutes les maladies qui affligent l’humanité.*”<sup>146</sup> For the Italian invert, it is in a novelistic setting that his manuscript should appear. Summers is surprised that realist and naturalist writers did not depict male homosexuality since their project was to scientifically account for every type of human behavior. He notes that “Zola not only created no gay male characters, he deliberately avoided a literary study of male homosexuality when offered the opportunity.”<sup>147</sup> Aron and Kempf notice that literature, tribunals and doctors are more lenient toward sapphism than toward male homosexuality. They relate this phenomenon to a male repression of homosexuality:

Subject to an emasculating moral code, the nineteenth-century bourgeois seeks pleasure in the evocation of lesbian loves. His virility makes the best of it and even rejoices in it as laying hands on some fantasmagoric possession: he evaluates, thanks to these forbidden games, the superiority of the strong sex. A voyeur with equivocal desires, he projects into revolting scenes his uncontrollable

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<sup>144</sup> Rivers, *Introduction* xxiv.

<sup>145</sup> Saint-Paul, *Tares* 47.

<sup>146</sup> Saint-Paul, *Tares* 47.

<sup>147</sup> Summers 297.

lot of repressed homosexuality and frees himself from it, without striking a blow, through the spectacle, real or imaginary, of servile womanhood.<sup>148</sup>

In conclusion, it seems, as Rosario remarks, that French physicians left the study of female homosexuality to novelists who viewed “lesbianism as an unthreatening or even titillating fictional existence,”<sup>149</sup> while their principal focus was on male homosexuality. It is important to keep in mind that the authors of the novels and medical treatises mentioned in the above discussion are all male, which limits the approach of homosexuality to a certain perspective and which shows how lesbianism was seen as pornographic. In a scientific discourse, these authors reveal the disturbing aspect of male homosexuality, which is rarely included in a literary discourse. Yet the opposite phenomenon appears for lesbianism, which occurs more often in novels than in scientific discourse. As to the human-animal relation to homosexuality, medical experts use the animal world as a point of reference and as a field of observation to understand human homosexuality. Although Zola recognizes scientific experimentation and observation as crucial features in claiming in *Le roman expérimental* that “si nous mettons la forme, le style à part, le romancier expérimentateur n’est plus qu’un savant spécial qui emploie l’outil des autres savants, l’observation et l’analyse,”<sup>150</sup> it is nevertheless clear that he does not use such an approach to homosexuality in his characters in *La curée* or in *Nana*. In the Zolian novels analyzed above, animal images are rarely used to describe homosexual characters. Baptiste is the only character whose homosexuality has some animal connotations. In any case, there is a clear

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<sup>148</sup> Aron and Kempf 149.

<sup>149</sup> Rosario, *Erotic Imagination* 109.

<sup>150</sup> Emile Zola, *Le roman expérimental* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971) 94.

relation between science and literature in the above discussion of homosexuality and in Zola's thoughts in general. Indeed in an 1894 interview, Zola said that "il me semble, toutefois, que l'art et la science font une grande alliance"<sup>151</sup> and that "le poète reste et restera le pionnier de l'humanité. Le savant suit, vérifie."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Emile Zola, *Le roman naturaliste: anthologie* (Paris: Poche Classique, 1999) 148.

<sup>152</sup> Zola, *Roman naturaliste* 147.

## 6. Nana's Enigmatic Human-Animal Status as Femme Fatale

### 6.1. The Myth of the Femme Fatale: Origins and Occurrences in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature

Franz Meier gives a short but concise definition of the myth of the femme fatale: “a female character that erotically fascinates and enchants a usually male partner who eventually is ruined or destroyed by this relationship.”<sup>1</sup> Virginia Allen notices that artists using the concept of the femme fatale do not use the term ‘femme fatale:’ “To them [artists] belongs the invention of the imagery; to the twentieth century, evidently, the invention of the label.”<sup>2</sup> Patrick Bade recognizes an “extraordinary proliferation of femmes fatales”<sup>3</sup> in European art and literature in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as a male conception of the femme fatale: “In nineteenth-century art women are seen almost exclusively through the eyes of men.”<sup>4</sup> Artists chose their femmes fatales among historical and literary sources. Salomé, who requires the head of John the Baptist in exchange for enchanting Herod by dancing before him,<sup>5</sup> is the most frequent and fascinating example drawn from the Bible, and she “was elevated to the status of an archetype”<sup>6</sup> in the second half of the nineteenth century. Historical figures such as Cleopatra and Messalina are known for their powers of seduction, and Helen of Troy, Medusa and Medea are examples of femmes fatales in Greek mythology. The English Pre-Raphaelites relate to the Middle Ages and

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Meier, “Oscar Wilde and the Myth of the *Femme Fatale* in *Fin-de-Siècle* Culture,” *The Importance of Reinventing Oscar: Versions of Wilde during the Last 100 Years*, ed. Uwe Boker (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 117.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia M. Allen, “The Femme Fatale: A Study of the Early Development of the Concept in Mid-Nineteenth Century Poetry and Painting,” diss., Boston U, 1979, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (New York: Mayflower, 1979) 6.

<sup>4</sup> Bade 6.

<sup>5</sup> In Gospels according to Matthew 14 and to Mark 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bade 7.

the female figures of Iseult, Guinevere and La Belle Dame Sans Merci. In French literature, Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* stands as an archetype of the femme fatale. The Chevalier des Grieux experiences a real *coup de foudre* when he sees Manon for the first time: "Elle était si charmante, que moi, [...] je me trouvai enflammé tout d'un coup, jusqu'au transport et à la folie."<sup>7</sup> Although the Chevalier is aware of Manon's betrayals, he cannot disentangle himself from her: "Plus je la connaissais, plus je découvrais en elle de nouvelles qualités aimables. Son esprit, son coeur, sa douceur et sa beauté, formaient une chaîne si forte et si charmante que j'avais mis tout mon bonheur à n'en sortir jamais."<sup>8</sup> It seems that Manon is a femme fatale in spite of herself and that she does not mean to harm her lover. Yet death is her punishment, and des Grieux views her as a victim of fate. In this eighteenth-century example, Manon remains a human femme fatale: there is no animal or diabolical connotation associated with her.

The animal, which is also predominant in Zola's depiction of Nana as femme fatale, appears in connection with the fatal woman in the hybrid monster such as the sphinx: "artists were extraordinarily inventive in adding new creatures to the repertory, joining the heads and breasts of women on to the bodies of insects, reptiles, snakes, various members of the cat family, vultures, and [...] even chickens. These creatures were representations of the base or animal side of woman, rather as the centaur and the satyr were of man in classical art."<sup>9</sup> Bestiality is also frequent in literary descriptions of the femme fatale: she "is often attended by animals, and a kinship or secret understanding between them is implied."<sup>10</sup> Prosper Mérimée's "Carmen" is an

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<sup>7</sup> Abbé Prévost, *Manon Lescaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 54.

<sup>8</sup> Prévost 60.

<sup>9</sup> Bade 8.

<sup>10</sup> Bade 8.

excellent illustration of the animalized femme fatale which offers interesting points of comparison with Nana. The narrator underscores Carmen's wild appearance men cannot forget: "C'était une beauté étrange et sauvage, une figure qui étonnait d'abord, mais qu'on ne pouvait oublier. Ses yeux surtout avaient une expression à la fois voluptueuse et farouche que je n'ai trouvée depuis à aucun regard humain. Oeil de bohémien, oeil de loup, c'est un dicton espagnol qui dénote une bonne observation."<sup>11</sup> It is clear that the bohemian femme fatale's wild eyes, of a "bête fauve,"<sup>12</sup> reveal her diabolical and demoniac nature. The narrator uses more animal metaphors to describe Carmen: she has "éclats de rire de crocodile,"<sup>13</sup> and when dancing, Carmen tears her falbalas and behaves like a monkey: "jamais singe ne fit plus de gambades, de grimaces, de diableries."<sup>14</sup> Don José notices Carmen's appealing moves: "Elle avait encore une fleur de cassie dans le coin de la bouche, et elle s'avancait en se balançant sur ses hanches comme une pouliche du haras de Cordoue."<sup>15</sup> Like Carmen, Nana displays such a hip movement and is also compared to a filly. When in prison, Carmen is on Don José's mind: "je ne pouvais m'empêcher de penser à elle. [...] Je regardais par les barreaux de la prison dans la rue, et, parmi toutes les femmes qui passaient, je n'en voyais pas une seule qui valût cette diable de fille-là. Et puis, malgré moi, je sentais la fleur de cassie qu'elle m'avait jetée, et qui, sèche, gardait toujours sa bonne odeur..."<sup>16</sup> Like Carmen, whose memory is associated with a powerful fragrance, Nana

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<sup>11</sup> Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* (Paris: Pocket, 1990) 47.

<sup>12</sup> Mérimée 96.

<sup>13</sup> Mérimée 83. The crocodile denotes hypocrisy in Spanish.

<sup>14</sup> Mérimée 83.

<sup>15</sup> Mérimée 55.

<sup>16</sup> Mérimée 61.

enchants Muffat by her strong female smell. The main difference between the bewitching emanations of these two femmes fatales is that Carmen's scent is that of a yellow and fragrant flower while Nana's is more animal and sexual. Yet the narrator is also the one to underscore that where Bohemians are concerned, "La saleté des deux sexes est incroyable."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, just as Nana's suitors feel powerless in front of her, Carmen dominates and renders her partner weak: "J'[Don José] étais si faible devant cette créature, que j'obéissais à tous ses caprices."<sup>18</sup> Finally, destiny plays a major role in this short story: Don José will have to kill Carmen because of an omen. In Zola's novel, it is more heredity and the milieu than fate that lead Nana to death.

Bade also notes the series of real femmes fatales in the nineteenth century: "such notorious courtesans as Cora Pearl, La Païva, Lillie Lantry and Otéro were conspicuous in society. It became fashionable to be ruined by one of these women. Indeed their reputations were based on the numbers of lovers they had ruined and the vast fortunes they had devoured."<sup>19</sup> It is also important to note men's roles in their relationships with expensive femmes fatales: in exchange for their financial contributions, the suitors receive not only pleasure but also fame in becoming topics of conversation. Balzac's Josépha of *La cousine Bette* is a famous opera singer and a good illustration of this type of courtesan. Baron Hulot finds her very expensive, but she supports him in difficult financial times and she even helps his wife Adeline. At the end of the story, Josépha is not punished since she is a good girl who means well.

For Joy Newton, the myth of the femme fatale implies the following characteristics: "The most striking shared feature is immense beauty, often not specifically defined, though vigorously

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<sup>17</sup> Mérimée 96.

<sup>18</sup> Mérimée 75.

<sup>19</sup> Bade 9.



attested by its effect on the onlooker.”<sup>20</sup> The femme fatale is also richly clothed, and she takes advantage of available artificial means such as the make-up Nana puts on before going on stage. The femme fatale appears as a “dominant figure,”<sup>21</sup> and Isabelle de Courtivron observes her masculine side: “The figure which appears during the Romantic period and lasts until World War I comes under the guise of an exotic, dominant, sadistic, and masculine woman....”<sup>22</sup> It is thus important to note the androgyny of the femme fatale: in addition to her feminine and attractive beauty, she reveals masculine features in her domineering behavior. The fatal woman is also “aware of the power of her gaze”<sup>23</sup> and is “often elevated by social status so that her inaccessibility acts as a further stimulus to male desire.”<sup>24</sup> In Balzac’s *La peau de chagrin*, “La comtesse Foedora, riche et sans amant, résistant à des séductions parisiennes”<sup>25</sup> is an inaccessible femme fatale to whom Raphaël is attracted. He courts her trying to resolve her enigmatic nature, as both a loving and an insensitive woman, yet “Foedora pouvait être expliquée de tant de manières, qu’elle devenait inexplicable.”<sup>26</sup> Raphaël soon realizes that she has “un coeur de bronze sous sa frêle et gracieuse enveloppe”<sup>27</sup> and that she has no feelings since she believes that

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<sup>20</sup> Joy Newton, “More about Eve: aspects of the *femme fatale* in literature and art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century France,” *Essays in French Literature* 28 (1991): 26.

<sup>21</sup> Newton 29.

<sup>22</sup> Isabelle de Courtivron, “Weak Men and Fatal Women: The Sand Image,” *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979) 213.

<sup>23</sup> Newton 29.

<sup>24</sup> Newton 29.

<sup>25</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La peau de chagrin* (Paris: Garnier, 1964) 113.

<sup>26</sup> Balzac 163.

<sup>27</sup> Balzac 149.

“avec de l’or, nous pouvons toujours créer autour de nous les sentiments qui sont nécessaires à notre bien-être.”<sup>28</sup> Raphaël manages to kiss Foedora’s hand but he is aware that he cannot make further moves because “si j’avais voulu faire un pas de plus au-delà de cette câlinerie fraternelle, j’eusse senti les griffes de la chatte.”<sup>29</sup> In her list of characteristics of the femme fatale, Newton continues that her surroundings are “other-wordly”<sup>30</sup> like Nana’s extravagant bedroom and Renée’s “cabinet de toilette,” and that “Sexual involvement [with her] is [...] invariably disastrous.”<sup>31</sup> As I will show in the analysis of Nana as animal, “there is specific reference to woman sharing certain animal traits, which suggests the treacherous side to beauty.”<sup>32</sup> Gérard Legrand<sup>33</sup> quotes Baudelaire who also links the femme fatale to the animal in his study of Constantin Guys: “Elle représente bien la sauvagerie dans la civilisation. Elle a sa beauté qui lui vient du Mal [...]. Elle porte le regard à l’horizon, comme la bête de proie.”<sup>34</sup> As a matter of fact, for Baudelaire, woman is an animal, evil and degraded being. In her role of femme fatale, she contaminates her male victims with her eyes as in the poem “Poison,” and she has a Satanic influence on men. In his poem “Bénédiction” from *Les fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire depicts an idolized but cruel female who becomes a monstrous bird brutally removing her lover’s heart:

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<sup>28</sup> Balzac 150.

<sup>29</sup> Balzac 165.

<sup>30</sup> Newton 28.

<sup>31</sup> Newton 31.

<sup>32</sup> Newton 30.

<sup>33</sup> Gérard Legrand, “De Baudelaire à Breton: le mythe de la femme fatale,” *Magazine Littéraire* 301 (1992): 42.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Constantin Guys: le peintre de la vie moderne* (Genève: La Palatine, 1943) 56-57.

Je poserai sur lui ma frêle et forte main;  
Et mes ongles, pareils aux ongles des harpies,  
Sauront jusqu'à son coeur se frayer un chemin.  
Comme un tout jeune oiseau qui tremble et qui palpite,  
J'arracherai ce coeur tout rouge de son sein,  
Et, pour rassasier ma bête favorite,  
Je le lui jetterai par terre avec dédain!<sup>35</sup>

This cruelty relates to another element of the fatal woman Mario Praz mentions: the femme fatale is sometimes a sexual cannibal as in Théophile Gautier's antic tale "Une nuit de Cléopâtre." Meïamoun the lion hunter is passionately attracted to "la femme la plus complète qui ait jamais existé, la plus femme et la plus reine"<sup>36</sup> and to her irresistibility: "chacun de [...] [ses] regards perce les coeurs comme les flèches d'or d'Eros lui-même."<sup>37</sup> Yet he cannot have her out of his mind since "La flèche était restée dans la plaie et il la traînait partout avec lui."<sup>38</sup> The exotic queen suffering from ennui offers Meïamoun an orgy and dances for him. Yet fate makes him drink the poison, although Cléopâtre wanted to prevent him from drinking: "Cleopatra, like the praying mantis, kills the male whom she loves."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Barbey d'Aurevilly, "another

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal* (Paris: Poche, 1972) 7.

<sup>36</sup> Théophile Gautier, "Une nuit de Cléopâtre," *Le Roman de la Momie précédé de trois contes antiques* (Paris: Garnier, 1963) 7.

<sup>37</sup> Gautier 13.

<sup>38</sup> Gautier 19.

<sup>39</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford UP, 1951) 205.

Holy Father of the Decadent Movement,”<sup>40</sup> shows men who become animals as a result of Rosalba’s fatal attraction in his short story “A un dîner d’athées.” Rosalba is a virgin-faced femme fatale who fascinates men by her enigmatic nature as both vicious and modest: “La Circé antique, qui changeait les hommes en bêtes, n’était rien en comparaison de cette Pudica, de cette Messaline-Vierge [...]”<sup>41</sup> Her jealous lover punishes her by closing her sexual parts with the burning wax she used to seal up a love letter.

Rebecca Stott claims that the femme fatale represents a type of Otherness, thus differentiating herself from the mainstream woman. This connotation of otherness appears in Flaubert’s exotic femme fatale, Salammbô. When she appears in front of the Barbarians for the first time, they are astonished by her beautiful *parure*, which reminds the reader of Gustave Moreau’s depiction of Salomé:

Sa chevelure, poudrée d’un sable violet, et réunie en forme de tour selon la mode des vierges chananéennes, la faisait paraître plus grande. Des tresses de perles attachées à ses tempes descendaient jusqu’aux coins de sa bouche, rose comme une grenade entr’ouverte. Il y avait sur sa poitrine un assemblage de pierres lumineuses, imitant par leur bigarrure les écailles d’une murène. Ses bras, garnis de diamants, sortaient nus de sa tunique sans manches, étoilée de fleurs rouges sur un fond tout noir. Elle portait entre les chevilles une chaînette d’or pour régler sa marche, et son grand manteau de pourpre sombre, taillé dans une étoffe inconnue,

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<sup>40</sup> Praz 311.

<sup>41</sup> Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly, “A un dîner d’athées,” *Oeuvres Romanesques Complètes*, ed. Jacques Petit, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) 214.

traînait derrière elle, faisant à chacun de ses pas comme une large vague qui la suivait.<sup>42</sup>

Since his first encounter with Salammbô, when she makes him drink a glass of wine as a gesture of reconciliation with the army, Mâtho feels totally bewitched by this pure femme fatale: “la fille d’Hamilcar me poursuit!”<sup>43</sup> “Elle me tient attaché par une chaîne que l’on n’aperçoit pas.”<sup>44</sup> After Mâtho steals the divine veil protecting the city of Carthage, Salammbô dresses magnificently to retrieve the “zaimph” from him in order to save Hamilcar and his troops. Her perfume dropping from her pearl earrings and her special multiple layers of clothing stun Mâtho who feels that “Un soulèvement de tout son être le précipitait vers elle”<sup>45</sup> and who tells her “tu m’appartiens.”<sup>46</sup> This is a fatal event for Salammbô who becomes feeble and who loses her virginity. Yet it is to Narr’Havas, Mâtho’s rival, that Hamilcar offers his daughter’s hand in marriage. The exotic femme fatale cannot forget Mâtho and she asks her fiancé to kill him. On her wedding day, Salammbô radiates beauty. When she sees Mâtho expiring, she feels fatally attracted to him: “Bien qu’il agonisât, elle le revoyait dans sa tente, à genoux, lui entourant la taille de ses bras, balbutiant des paroles douces; elle avait soif de les sentir encore, de les

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<sup>42</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô*, Oeuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert (Paris: Conard, 1902) 14.

<sup>43</sup> Flaubert 39.

<sup>44</sup> Flaubert 40.

<sup>45</sup> Flaubert 260.

<sup>46</sup> Flaubert 264.

entendre [...],”<sup>47</sup> and dies a few moments after him. The theory of impregnation seems to affect Salammbô, who cannot forget her first sexual partner, as Zola notes in his comments on the novel: “elle est fidèle à celui qui l’a possédée. Elle est tourmentée par son souvenir, elle se sent devenue à lui [...]. Elle est à qui l’a prise. Elle ne quitte l’adoration de Tanit, que pour rester marquée du premier baiser qu’elle a reçu; elle n’a pas voulu ce baiser, mais il sera le premier et le dernier, et elle en mourra.”<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Allen shows that lack of fecundity is another distinctive feature of the femme fatale:

The femme fatale, no matter how amorous, does not conceive. Sin alone may feed at her luscious breast. She was construed as the woman who controlled her own sexuality, who seduced men and drained them of their “vital powers,” in an exercise of eroticism that had no issue. She was –and is- the diametric opposite of the “good” woman who passively accepted impregnation, motherhood, domesticity, the control and domination of her sexual activity by men.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that the femme fatale does not experience maternity despite her numerous sexual relations is in total contradiction with her being compared to the animal. Unless they are infertile, these fatal women use a method of birth control, which narrators do not mention so as not to make these femmes fatales rational beings. It seems thus that these female protagonists are neither animal nor human but rather in-between the two in this matter. Valérie Marneffe, the

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<sup>47</sup> Flaubert 412-13.

<sup>48</sup> Emile Zola, *Les romanciers naturalistes* (Paris: Charpentier, 1914) 153-54.

<sup>49</sup> Allen 11.

femme fatale in Balzac's *La cousine Bette*, uses maternity as a powerful argument to require more money from her suitors. In spite of the hopes of paternity she gives them and her frequent sexual relations, Madame Marneffe does not conceive. She is a beast of prey, a venomous snake and a Machiavellian femme fatale who uses her beauty as a means to make her fortune: "Madame Marneffe est donc en quelque sorte le type de ces ambitieuses courtisanes mariées qui, de prime abord, acceptent la dépravation dans toutes ses conséquences, et qui sont décidées à faire fortune en s'amusant, sans scrupule sur les moyens; mais elles ont presque toujours, [...] leurs maris pour embaucheurs et pour complices. Ces Machiavels en jupon sont les femmes les plus dangereuses."<sup>50</sup> She costs baron Hulot twice as much as the opera singer Josépha did. She entangles, fascinates and ruins baron Hulot, Crevel, Wenceslas and the Brazilian Montejanos. Yet this unscrupulous femme fatale dies as punishment for her evil misdeeds: Montejanos infects her with a mysterious exotic disease, which makes her "d'une ignoble laideur."<sup>51</sup> Like Nana's, her beautiful body is in decomposition and emanates a disagreeable odor: "ses dents et ses cheveux tombent, elle a l'aspect des lépreux, elle se fait horreur à elle-même; ses mains, épouvantables à voir, sont enflées et couvertes de pustules verdâtres; les ongles déchaussés restent dans les plaies qu'elle gratte; enfin toutes les extrémités se détruisent dans la sanie qui les ronge."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La cousine Bette* (Paris: Pocket, 1994) 191.

<sup>51</sup> Balzac, *Cousine Bette* 500.

<sup>52</sup> Balzac, *Cousine Bette* 500.

Finally, for Stott, the femme fatale has become a stereotype because of “the manufacture of texts;”<sup>53</sup> Allen also notes this phenomenon due to “the extended imitation of their forms [of femmes fatales] by others, and the medium of satire, fashion, and design.”<sup>54</sup> This introduction to the femme fatale in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that this concept is not a fixed entity and that it has a variety of versions, from the cruel Mme Marneffe to the animal Carmen, the exotic Salammbô and the cannibalistic Cléopâtre to the good Josépha. Indeed, Praz discusses the line of tradition of the fatal woman and makes clear that there is no specific type or *cliché* of it in the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the above contextualization of the myth highlights the characteristics of the femme fatale which make Nana a recognizable figure of this literary tradition. We will see now that the femme fatale is also a prominent figure in the visual arts of the period.

## 6.2. Images of the Femme Fatale in the Arts

Painters such as Gustave Courbet, Edgar Degas, Fernand Khnopff, Félicien Rops and Gabriel Rossetti depicted the myth of the fatal woman. My purpose is to discuss only two artists, namely Gustave Moreau and Edouard Manet, who reveal interesting connections to Zola. To start with the former, Newton shows the links between Zola’s Nana and Gustave Moreau’s paintings of Salomé, of “*la Femme fatale absolue*.”<sup>56</sup> The symbolist painter relates to Nana as femme fatale

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<sup>53</sup> Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992) 31.

<sup>54</sup> Allen 2.

<sup>55</sup> Praz 191.

<sup>56</sup> Mireille Dottin-Orsini, *Cette femme qu’ils disent fatale* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) 133.



since his favorite theme “is that of Fatality, of Evil and Death incarnate in female beauty.”<sup>57</sup> For instance, Nana and Salomé’s dancing appears as a means of seduction: in the first scene of the novel, Nana shows talent not as a singer but as an attractive dancer. Zola reviews Moreau’s Salomé paintings in his *Salons* of 1876 as “la plus étonnante manifestation des extravagances où peut tomber un artiste dans la recherche de l’originalité et la haine du réalisme.”<sup>58</sup> Zola categorizes Moreau’s style as symbolist, the value of which is “une simple réaction contre le monde moderne.”<sup>59</sup> It seems thus that Moreau’s talent goes beyond Zola’s grasp of the world: the art critic remains stunned since Moreau has a totally different perception of art from his own. Allen claims that “Moreau’s reputation must be credited to Huysmans,”<sup>60</sup> who, in *A rebours*, describes the Salomé figure through des Esseintes’ eyes. From this extensive description, the comparison of Salomé to the beast is the most striking for our purpose: “elle devenait [...] la Bête monstrueuse, indifférente, irresponsable, insensible, empoisonnant, de même que l’Hélène antique, tout ce qui l’approche, tout ce qui la voit, tout ce qu’elle touche.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed in the Salomé paintings, Moreau uses surrounding images of the panther and the sphinx, thus emphasizing her roles as “temptress and destroyer.”<sup>62</sup> As to the 1876 painting *Salomé dansant devant Hérode*, Zola admits his inability to depict this masterpiece and quotes another critic’s description

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<sup>57</sup> Praz 295.

<sup>58</sup> Emile Zola, *Salons*, Société de Publications Romanes et Françaises LXIII (Genève: Droz, 1959) 187.

<sup>59</sup> Zola, *Salons* 188.

<sup>60</sup> Allen 269.

<sup>61</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *A rebours* (Paris: Pocket, 1999) 95.

<sup>62</sup> Julius Kaplan, “Moreau, Gustave,” *From Monet to Cézanne: Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century French Artists*, ed. Jane Turner, The Grove Dictionary of Art (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000) 316.

instead. In his review of the Universal Exhibit of 1878, Zola mentions Moreau again, “dont le talent est si étourdissant qu’on ne sait où le caser.”<sup>63</sup> Zola has some reservations towards Moreau’s art as the adjective “étourdissant” suggests: “j’avouerais que les théories artistiques de Gustave Moreau sont diamétralement opposées aux miennes. Elles me choquent et m’irritent. C’est un talent symboliste et archaïsant qui, non content de dédaigner la vie contemporaine, propose les plus bizarres énigmes.”<sup>64</sup> As the aforementioned quotations show, Zola does not adhere to Moreau’s aesthetic ideals and remains dumbfounded in front of them.

Another type of connection between visual arts and literature occurs between Zola and Manet who have similar agendas. Zola wrote several articles on the Impressionist painter whom the public or the “bêtes routinières”<sup>65</sup> highly criticized for his new but unusual painting style. Zola praises Manet’s originality in his “traductions [...] simples et [...] sincères de la nature.”<sup>66</sup> Manet’s approach is close to the scientific since he analyzes and offers a precise observation of man in nature in his works. He is thus “un des infatigables ouvriers du naturalisme.”<sup>67</sup> To Zola, *Olympia* of 1863 is Manet’s masterwork: “Je prétends que cette toile est véritablement la chair et le sang du peintre [...]. Elle est l’expression complète de son tempérament.”<sup>68</sup> This famous painting represents a young, naked and pale girl named Olympia lying on a bed while a Negro woman brings a bouquet and while an almost invisible black cat stands in the dark background.

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<sup>63</sup> Zola, *Salons* 218.

<sup>64</sup> Zola, *Salons* 219.

<sup>65</sup> Zola, *Salons* 101.

<sup>66</sup> Zola, *Salons* 91.

<sup>67</sup> Zola, *Salons* 244.

<sup>68</sup> Zola, *Salons* 97.

Zola underlines the truth inherent in this reproduction of a sixteen year old street girl: Manet does not picture her as an ideal beauty but “le peintre a procédé comme la nature procède elle-même, par masses claires, par larges pans de lumière, et son oeuvre a l’aspect un peu rude et austère de la nature.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore Zola defends his friend from accusations of obscenity in the presence of the cat. Indeed this cat could relate to the French *chatte*, which is a vulgar term for the feminine sex. Yet Zola claims that a color contrast explains the presence of the cat and that “Il vous [à Manet] fallait une femme nue, et vous avez choisi Olympia, la première venue; il vous fallait des taches claires et lumineuses, et vous avez mis un bouquet; il vous fallait des taches noires, et vous avez placé dans un coin une négresse et un chat.”<sup>70</sup> However in another article, Zola views the cat as a comic element of the painting *Olympia*: “Il est vrai que ce chat est d’un haut comique, n’est-ce pas? Et qu’il faut être insensé pour avoir mis un chat dans ce tableau. Un chat, vous imaginez cela. Un chat noir, qui plus est. C’est très drôle...”<sup>71</sup> Zola’s defensive tone prevents him from giving more importance to the link between woman and animal in *Olympia*. Yet I believe that the cat is a crucial component of *Olympia* as a femme fatale as it will be the case in the depiction of Nana in Zola’s novel. Henri Mitterand claims that Manet’s *Olympia* marked Zola and had an intense effect of revelation on him:

avant toutes les femmes qui vont suivre dans son œuvre, de Renée à Nana et à Séverine, il y aura eu *Olympia*, avec sa peau, sa main sur son sexe, les yeux de braise de son chat noir, son regard à secret, les froissements du linge, le mystère de cette féminité lumineuse s’enlevant sur l’obscurité du fond, et aussi la charge

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<sup>69</sup> Zola, *Salons* 97.

<sup>70</sup> Zola, *Salons* 98.

<sup>71</sup> Zola, *Salons* 67.

équivoque de tous les signes qui s'entrecroisent sur la jeune femme et autour d'elle.<sup>72</sup>

Manet also painted Zola's portrait. Once again, Zola compares himself in the posing session to an element of Nature: "il me copiait comme il aurait copié une bête humaine quelconque, avec une attention, une conscience artistique que je n'ai jamais vue ailleurs."<sup>73</sup> Zola especially appreciates the painter's attention given to details such as accessories and books on the author's desk. It is worth noting that in this portrait a reproduction of *Olympia* is hanging above Zola's desk and that her look is directed toward the naturalist author. Mitterand underlines this phenomenon as a way for Manet to celebrate his public defender: "elle [Olympia] détourne carrément ses yeux vers la droite, semblant ainsi échapper au tableau qui l'immobilisait pour entrer dans l'intimité de l'écrivain qui a célébré le premier sa beauté. Hommage singulier, et peut-être reconnaissance de parenté avec les premières héroïnes de Zola, Laurence et Thérèse, comme elle femmes de sexe, de solitude et de malheur."<sup>74</sup> Nana is another common denominator between Zola and Manet. The painter has an 1877 work entitled *Nana* depicting an actress in under-clothes putting on make-up in front of her mirror while an elegant gentleman watches her. George Holden underlines the influence of Zola's *L'assommoir* on the naturalist painter: Manet "captivated by Zola's sketch in Chapter Eleven of Gervaise Macquart's precociously immoral

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<sup>72</sup> Henri Mitterand, *Zola Tome I: sous le regard d'Olympia 1840-1871* (Paris: Fayard, 1999) 432.

<sup>73</sup> Zola, *Salons* 124.

<sup>74</sup> Mitterand 600.

daughter, gave the title *Nana* to his portrait of the courtesan, Henriette Hauser.”<sup>75</sup> Manet’s *Nana* has then influenced Zola’s *Nana*: “Zola in his turn created, three years after the painting, the first big scene demonstrating Nana’s sexual allure in an environment and with props that recall the sensational canvas by Manet.”<sup>76</sup> According to Margaret Armbrust Seibert, “Chaque année, Manet peignait la prostituée de l’année.”<sup>77</sup> Thus Zola and Manet share the topic of the prostitute in their respective works entitled *Nana*. We can conclude with Tintner that “the relation between painter and novelist was reciprocal. Manet’s salute in 1877 to Zola’s heroine in her first incarnation is returned by Zola in 1880 when he sees her, in a little corner of his creation, through the temperament of Manet.”<sup>78</sup>

### 6.3. *Nana* as Animalized Femme Fatale

In this section, I will show that there is a crucial link between the animal and *Nana* as femme fatale. As a matter of fact, the courtesan needs to be a beast in order to act as a femme fatale: we will see that *Nana*’s proximity to the animal makes men release their inner animality. Nevertheless, granting *Nana* the status of pure animal is not possible: she incessantly moves between the human and the animal, which renders her case ambiguous and thus even more interesting.

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<sup>75</sup> George Holden, Introduction, *Nana*, by Emile Zola, trans. George Holden, Penguin classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 9.

<sup>76</sup> Adeline R. Tintner, “What Zola’s *Nana* Owes to Manet’s *Nana*,” *Iris* 2.8 (1983): 15.

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Armbrust Seibert, “*Nana*: une autre source,” *Les Cahiers Naturalistes* 73 (1999): 189.

<sup>78</sup> Tintner 16.

In an article entitled “Comment elles poussent,” Zola claims that Parisian prostitutes experience degeneration because of their miserable milieu. He underlines “la bêtise des filles”<sup>79</sup> and that “Plus elles sont belles, plus elles sont bêtes.”<sup>80</sup> In using the ambivalent term *bête* for Nana, Zola infers not only stupidity but also the animal. Yet, in the first scene of the novel, it is the theater audience which is perceived as *bête*: the crowd screams for Nana “dans un de ces coups d’esprit bête et de brutale sensualité [...]”<sup>81</sup> As matter of fact, “Portrayed as pure soulless carnality, she [Nana] provokes simple mindless desire in others, thus degrading them to the level of *bête*. This, Zola would seem to suggest, is the danger of Nana: by reducing men to the level of their senses, she robs them of their powers of reason and judgment.”<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, in his “Carnet d’enquête” on Nana, Zola underscores the animality of the main characters: “Tous menés par la queue, et la femme recevant ça, indifférente. Une meute derrière une chienne, qui n’est pas en chaleur.”<sup>83</sup> The ambiguity concerning Nana as animal begins with this quote: although a female dog, Nana is not fully animal since she is not in heat. Interestingly, lust appears in the male, which foreshadows Nana’s ability to contagiously transfer the animal to men. She resembles thus the goddess Circe who uses a potion and her magic wand to reduce Odysseus’ companions to hogs. These men then look like hogs in their voice and appearance;

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<sup>79</sup> Emile Zola, “Comment elles poussent,” *Une campagne* (Paris: Bernouard, 1928) 130.

<sup>80</sup> Zola, *Comment elles poussent* 131.

<sup>81</sup> Emile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002) 28.

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier, and Zola* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994) 189.

<sup>83</sup> Emile Zola, *Carnets d’enquêtes: une ethnographie inédite de la France*, ed. Henri Mitterand, *Terre humaine* (Paris: Plon, 1993) 312.

only their spirit does not change and remains human. We will see a similar transformation in Comte Muffat whose body becomes animal under Nana's influence.

Bordenave, the theater director, claims that "Nana a autre chose, [...] quelque chose qui remplace tout,"<sup>84</sup> and he is the first to notice Nana's exceptional sex appeal: "Nana était si blanche et si grasse, si nature dans ce personnage fort des hanches et de la gueule, que tout de suite elle gagna la salle entière."<sup>85</sup> Her power of attraction is described in both human and animal terms: "hanche," a body part both human and animal, foreshadows Nana's double nature, while "nature" and "gueule" reveal her animal side. Sander Gilman quotes Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet who proposes an anthropology of Parisian prostitutes and who indicates prostitutes' plumpness as a sign of "their lassitude, since they rise at ten or eleven in morning, "leading an animal life."<sup>86</sup> The prostitute's fleshliness is underlined in Manet's portrayal of Nana, which inspired Zola; Gilman sees this as a sign of destructive sexuality.<sup>87</sup>

It is when Nana, "très grande, très forte pour ses dix-huit ans,"<sup>88</sup> is totally naked in the first scene of the novel that she has a tremendous effect on her audience:

Nana était nue. Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair. Une simple gaze l'enveloppait; ses épaules rondes, sa gorge d'amazone dont les pointes roses se tenaient levées et rigides comme des lances,

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<sup>84</sup> Zola, *Nana* 25.

<sup>85</sup> Zola, *Nana* 41.

<sup>86</sup> Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 223.

<sup>87</sup> Gilman 234.

<sup>88</sup> Zola, *Nana* 35.

ses larges hanches qui roulaient dans un balancement voluptueux, ses cuisses de blonde grasse, tout son corps se devinait, se voyait sous le tissu léger, d'une blancheur d'écume. [...] Et, lorsque Nana levait les bras, on apercevait, aux feux de la rampe, les poils d'or de ses aisselles. Il n'y eut pas d'applaudissements. Personne ne riait plus, les faces des hommes, sérieuses, se tendaient, avec le nez aminci, la bouche irritée et sans salive. Un vent semblait avoir passé très doux, chargé d'une sourde menace. Tout d'un coup, dans la bonne enfant, la femme se dressait, inquiétante, apportant le coup de folie de son sexe, ouvrant l'inconnu du désir. Nana souriait toujours, mais d'un sourire aigu de mangeuse d'hommes.<sup>89</sup>

Nana's breasts are clearly symbols of feminine sexuality and important elements of her sex-appeal as a fatal woman. The term "amazone" further reinforces her female powerfulness: it refers to a female horse rider and to some extent to the mythic woman warrior. Nana's status of animal is ambiguous in the penultimate line of this quotation: she is said to bring "le coup de folie de son sexe," yet it remains unclear whether sex refers to women in general or to her own sex organ which would then imply her being in heat. Naomi Schor claims that "Nana est insaisissable"<sup>90</sup> and that her enigmatic nature is not resolved at the end of the story. Chantal Bertrand-Jennings views Nana's first appearance on stage as a strong link between woman and

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<sup>89</sup> Zola, *Nana* 47.

<sup>90</sup> Naomi, Schor, "Le sourire du sphinx: Zola et l'énigme de la féminité," *Romantisme* 13-14 (1976): 186.



sex and as a comparison to the sphinx: “Il suffit donc que Nana se dénude pour que, sous le masque anodin de l’actrice courtisane, apparaisse aussitôt la silhouette inquiétante du sphinx.”<sup>91</sup>

Nana, who is now in heat, has such power over the male audience that “chaque homme la subissait. Le rut qui montait d’elle, ainsi que d’une bête en folie, s’était répandu toujours davantage, emplissant la salle.”<sup>92</sup> The narrator underlines a contrast between Nana as animal and the audience as human since “Depuis trois heures qu’on était là, les haleines avaient chauffé l’air d’une odeur humaine.”<sup>93</sup> It is clear that, in the first chapter of the novel, Nana’s animality has a powerful effect of seduction, which sets her apart from her human audience. At the end of the representation, men are tremendously affected by Nana’s sensuality and seem to have reached an orgasm: “cette cohue d’hommes aux lèvres sèches, aux yeux ardents, tout brûlants encore de la possession de Nana.”<sup>94</sup> In the same vein as Nana, Renée, “[aux] cheveux fauve pâle,”<sup>95</sup> has similar sex-appeal in *La curée*, a novel which focuses on the “mangeurs de curée”<sup>96</sup> rather than on a “mangeuse d’hommes.”<sup>97</sup> Every time she arrives at parties, people admire her divine beauty. At the court ball, Renée’s beauty is underlined by her “toilette prodigieuse de grâce et d’originalité.”<sup>98</sup> “C’était une simple robe de gaze blanche, mais garnie d’une multitude de petits

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<sup>91</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L’éros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 58.

<sup>92</sup> Zola, *Nana* 48.

<sup>93</sup> Zola, *Nana* 49.

<sup>94</sup> Zola, *Nana* 51.

<sup>95</sup> Emile Zola, *La curée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 40.

<sup>96</sup> Zola, *Curée* 334.

<sup>97</sup> Zola, *Nana* 47.

<sup>98</sup> Zola, *Curée* 166.

volants découpés et bordés d'un filet de velours noir. La tunique, de velours noir, était décolletée en carré, très bas sur la gorge, qu'encadrait une dentelle mince, haute à peine d'un doigt."<sup>99</sup> When the emperor sees Renée, a light of animality enlightens his eyes: "[il] avait des lueurs fauves dans l'hésitation grise de ses yeux brouillés."<sup>100</sup> At the Ministry ball, Renée, who is "merveilleuse"<sup>101</sup> in a sumptuous dress, is like an idol: "les intimes s'inclinaient, avec un discret sourire d'intelligence, rendant hommage à ces belles épaules, si connues du tout Paris officiel, et qui étaient les fermes colonnes de l'Empire."<sup>102</sup> Renée's brother-in-law who is a powerful politician notices her "coup d'audace d'avoir échancre son corsage de deux doigts de plus"<sup>103</sup> and even believes that her naked breast is more eloquent than his power at the Chamber. Renée's dresses cover less and less of her body at these social events to the point of her being almost naked in a transparent costume of "Otaïtienne" at the last ball depicted in the novel. She triumphs in the same way as Nana who also has such suggestive apparel on stage. Yet the main difference between these two femmes fatales revealing their bodies is that, contrary to Nana, Renée is ashamed of her nakedness and holds Saccard and Maxime responsible.

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<sup>99</sup> Zola, *Curée* 166.

<sup>100</sup> Zola, *Curée* 167.

<sup>101</sup> Zola, *Curée* 205.

<sup>102</sup> Zola, *Curée* 205.

<sup>103</sup> Zola, *Curée* 205.

#### 6.4. The Smell of the Femme Fatale Nana

Nana's smell is also a crucial component of her power of attraction and of her animality, and her audience cannot resist her strong womanly odor: "cette grosse fille qui se tapait sur les cuisses, qui gloussait comme une poule, dégageait autour d'elle une odeur de vie, une toute-puissance de femme, dont le public se grisait."<sup>104</sup> Katrina Perry notes that "the *Petit Robert* gives the slang term for prostitute, "pute," as a derivation from the latin "putidus," meaning "puant," or stinking. This odorant or warning smell signals not only the prostitute's low class, familial defects, and female emanations, but also, [...] her excessive commerce with men and semen."<sup>105</sup> Muffat is the character who is the most sensible to Nana's enkindling essence. In her dressing room, he experiences a sensual vertigo:

Un moment, craignant de défaillir dans cette odeur de femme qu'il retrouvait, chauffée, décuplée sous le plafond bas, il s'assit au bord du divan capitonné, entre les deux fenêtres. Mais il se releva tout de suite, retourna près de la toilette, ne regarda plus rien, les yeux vagues, songeant à un bouquet de tubéreuses, qui s'était fané dans sa chambre autrefois, et dont il avait failli mourir. Quand les tubéreuses se décomposent, elles ont une odeur humaine.<sup>106</sup>

The narrator compares Nana's body odor to the sweet and pervasive smell of tuberose. The last line of the above quotation foreshadows Nana's putrefaction at the end of the novel when she loses her irresistible animal sex appeal and when she retrieves her human side: "the odor of

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<sup>104</sup> Zola, *Nana* 41.

<sup>105</sup> Katrina Perry, "Containing the Scent: "Odor di Femina" in Zola's *Nana*," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 10 (1991): 163.

<sup>106</sup> Zola, *Nana* 152.

woman is linked first to flowers, then to decaying vegetation, danger and death, before finally circling back to human scent.”<sup>107</sup> Catherine Bordeau mentions Zola’s interest in the effect of women’s scent and quotes his letter to Etienne Tardif who was writing a medical thesis on odors and perfumes:

Mes quelques observations n’ont porté que sur l’odeur naturelle, particulière à la femme. Elle est très variable selon les sujets, et je suis convaincu que parfois elle a, sur le sens génésique, une influence considérable, qui explique certaines grandes passions. Il est certain que le sens de l’odorat est un des pièges par lesquels la nature prend le mâle, pour assurer la propagation de l’espèce. Voyez chez les animaux, à l’époque du rut; et j’ajouterai, voyez chez les hommes, bien que des observations précises manquent ici complètement.<sup>108</sup>

Bordeau underscores the female connection with Nature and remarks that “In casting women’s scent as nature’s “trap” for men, he [Zola] evokes a certain power struggle between male and female, in which women are aligned with nature.”<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Nana is a personification of Nature because of her proximity to the animal and her powerful smell she uses as a trick to attract men. Zola also refers to a lack of information regarding the precise role of scent in humans; it seems thus that this blank in scientific studies mirrors the difficulty in determining the human and the animal in the femme fatale Nana.

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<sup>107</sup> Perry 161.

<sup>108</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 8 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 384.

<sup>109</sup> Catherine Bordeau, “The Power of the Feminine Milieu in Zola’s *Nana*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 27.1-2 (1998-99): 98.

Comte Muffat feels sexually possessed by Nana even before they have any physical contact:

Lui qui n'avait jamais vu la comtesse Muffat mettre ses jarretières, il assistait aux détails intimes d'une toilette de femme, dans la débandade des pots et des cuvettes, au milieu de cette odeur si forte et si douce. Tout son être se révoltait, la lente possession dont Nana l'envahissait depuis quelque temps l'effrayait, en lui rappelant ses lectures de piété, les possessions diaboliques qui avaient bercé son enfance. Il croyait au diable. Nana, confusément, était le diable, avec ses rires, avec sa gorge et sa croupe, gonflées de vices.<sup>110</sup>

Nana is a satanic animal disturbing Muffat's religious beliefs: the term "croupe" has a double meaning which serves to underline Nana's dual being: it mainly refers to the croup of an animal such as a horse but it is also sexually specific of a woman's buttock. Muffat is so carried away by the feminine essence in the dressing room that he becomes feeble and he loses the power to make decisions: "il ferma les yeux, et il but dans une aspiration tout le sexe de la femme, qu'il ignorait encore et qui lui battait le visage."<sup>111</sup> He cannot prevent himself from kissing Nana's neck out of a burst of desire. At the end of his visit to Nana's dressing room, Muffat, totally possessed by her, would do anything to spend an hour with this powerful femme fatale. Yet Nana makes him wait three months before giving in to his advances "afin de l'allumer davantage."<sup>112</sup> Until that day Muffat's body reflects his torments: both his head and his hands are burning with desire.

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<sup>110</sup> Zola, *Nana* 158-59.

<sup>111</sup> Zola, *Nana* 170.

<sup>112</sup> Zola, *Nana* 193.

Even his religious advisor M. Venot who argues against sexual temptations cannot prevent him from sinning with Nana. Although Muffat possesses Nana sexually, it is the femme fatale who possesses him sensually: “il vivait au milieu d’un tel étourdissement sensuel, qu’en dehors du besoin de la posséder, il n’éprouvait rien de bien net.”<sup>113</sup>

### **6.5. Nana’s Metamorphoses into Animals**

In his Figaro article entitled “La mouche d’or,” Fauchery recounts Nana’s life and her social origins in the low classes. As a femme fatale, she has the power to contaminate and corrupt the upper classes: “Elle devenait une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction, sans le vouloir elle-même, corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige.”<sup>114</sup> It is at the end of the article that Nana is compared to a fly, to “une mouche couleur de soleil, envolée de l’ordure, une mouche qui prenait la mort sur les charognes tolérées le long des chemins, et qui, bourdonnante, dansante, jetant un éclat de pierreries, empoisonnait les hommes rien qu’à se poser sur eux, dans les palais où elle entrait par les fenêtres.”<sup>115</sup> In this metaphoric description, the narrator clearly underscores not only Nana’s animal nature but also her power traditionally associated with the femme fatale: she transfers death from animals in putrefaction to rich men. The element of rot literally foreshadows Nana’s end and figuratively underscores her moral corruption. Zola reveals Nana’s dual nature in the aforementioned quote: terms such as “soleil,” “bourdonnante” and “dansante” denote her positive side while “ordure,” “mort,” “charogne” and “empoisonnait”

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<sup>113</sup> Zola, *Nana* 213.

<sup>114</sup> Zola, *Nana* 224.

<sup>115</sup> Zola, *Nana* 224-25.

mark her negative side. This germ taken from cadavers could stand as a metaphor for syphilis. At the time, prostitution caused an increase of syphilis: the prostitute becomes a threat to her partner and she is thus seen as a femme fatale.

Christopher Rivers underlines heredity as a fundamental element of the myth and notes that “nowhere in the novel is Zola’s profound disgust for Nana more clearly revealed than in the analogy between Nana and a disease-ridden insect.”<sup>116</sup> “La mouche d’or” is a “narrative of origins”<sup>117</sup> which “reveals the organizing principles of Zola’s deterministic view of human life.”<sup>118</sup> For Rivers, biology and sociology as well as moral and physical phenomena are linked here showing that “a certain class of people is genetically condemned to vice.”<sup>119</sup> Thus Zola proposes another myth, besides the myth of the femme fatale: “there seems to be a myth associating economic and social disadvantage with moral depravity.”<sup>120</sup> Yet the example of Renée, a dissolute woman of the upper classes of society in *La curée*, contradicts this interpretation, and the myth of the femme fatale is definitely central to the novel *Nana*. I think that Rivers’ interpretation of *Nana* fails to recognize the duality of the heroine’s character displayed in her incessant movements between the human and the animal. Although Nana sometimes appears as a shrewd femme fatale, the narrator also underscores her state of innocence as a *bonne fille*. Rivers concludes that “In direct contradiction to Zola’s explicit sociopolitical views, which tended to be progressive for the period, the ethos communicated in

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<sup>116</sup> Rivers 193.

<sup>117</sup> Rivers 195.

<sup>118</sup> Rivers 195.

<sup>119</sup> Rivers 197.

<sup>120</sup> Rivers 197.

Nana is one of repression, fear, and prejudice. [...] Zola falls prey to, and propagates, pernicious myths.”<sup>121</sup> I disagree with Rivers’ negative conclusive remarks: Nana has an ambiguous status which prevents agreement with such one-sided opinions. Rivers fails to discuss the fascinating and intriguing figure that is Nana.

The narrator locates the golden beast conveying death through sex in Nana’s pubic hair: “Nana était toute velue, un duvet de rousse faisait de son corps un velours; tandis que, dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis profonds, qui donnaient au sexe le voile troublant de leur ombre, il y avait de la bête. C’était la bête d’or, inconsciente comme une force, et dont l’odeur seule gâtait le monde.”<sup>122</sup> Thus “Nana, dans sa nudité, devient le sexe même, «l’animal. »”<sup>123</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings notices that “Le caractère bestial de la femme sexuée est également rendu tangible par le mélange de malpropreté, d’étroitesse étouffante, de chaleur suffocante et nauséabonde qui marque tous les lieux de l’intimité féminine dans *Nana*.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, Nana has a dog named Bijou with whom she spends a lot of time and who frolics with her: “Bijou, le griffon écossais, la réveillait en lui léchant la figure; et c’était alors un joujou de cinq minutes, des courses du chien à travers ses bras et ses cuisses, qui blessaient le comte Muffat. Bijou fut le premier petit homme dont il eût de la jalousie. Ce n’était pas convenable qu’une bête mît de la sorte le nez sous les couvertures.”<sup>125</sup> On another level, the main difference between men and Bijou is that humans die

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<sup>121</sup> Rivers 196.

<sup>122</sup> Zola, *Nana* 226.

<sup>123</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 57.

<sup>124</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 59.

<sup>125</sup> Zola, *Nana* 326.



of their encounter with Nana while the humanized animal Bijou survives sexual contacts with the animalized Nana. Mireille Dottin-Orsini relates this scene to a painting by Edgar Degas, which “représente une femme agenouillée sur son lit, jouant avec son chien.”<sup>126</sup> Nana has the power to make men become animals. For instance, Steiner looks like a sickened dog: Steiner “était pris, et si rudement que, près de Nana, il restait comme assommé, mangeant sans faim, la lèvre pendante, la face marbrée de taches. Elle n’avait qu’à dire un chiffre.”<sup>127</sup>

Furthermore, Nana, whom the narrator depicts in a beautiful poetic way, is welcomed like a queen by the public of the Grand Prix: “il n’y avait bientôt plus qu’une foule, qu’un vacarme, autour de son landau; et elle régnait parmi les verres qui se tendaient, avec ses cheveux jaunes envolés, son visage de neige, baigné de soleil.”<sup>128</sup> She shares her name with a filly, which has higher and higher odds to win after Nana’s arrival. There is specific sexual connotation to Nana the femme fatale and Nana the filly: men make crude jokes about the person mounting Nana. Nana and the filly are joined in a beautiful humanized animal, “la pouliche alezane d’une blondeur de fille rousse.”<sup>129</sup> Nana’s predominance over her surroundings is also marked by a size metaphor: the crowd is compared to tiny insects but Nana as a filly has a bigger stature. Nana imitates the filly when the latter is running: “sur le siège, Nana, sans le savoir, avait pris un balancement des cuisses et des reins, comme si elle-même eût couru. Elle donnait des coups de ventre, il lui semblait que ça aidait la pouliche.”<sup>130</sup> At this point Nana becomes-filly: she emits

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<sup>126</sup> Dottin-Orsini 196.

<sup>127</sup> Zola, *Nana* 120.

<sup>128</sup> Zola, *Nana* 363.

<sup>129</sup> Zola, *Nana* 374.

<sup>130</sup> Zola, *Nana* 378-79.

equine corpuscles that come into contact with similar animal particles in an indiscernible zone. Nana only becomes a molecular filly; she is not a molar filly neighing. The crowd shouts “Nana” so loudly that “l’on ne savait plus si c’était la bête ou la femme qui emplissait les coeurs.”<sup>131</sup> The filly Nana mounted by Price wins the Grand Prix, which adds to the triumph of Nana as femme fatale. I agree with Peter Conroy that the animal metaphors discussed above are crucial elements of Nana as a myth: “Nana is so much larger than life that it is almost impossible to speak of her in ordinary terms;”<sup>132</sup> “Nana is not a recognizable, historically identifiable person.”<sup>133</sup>

In her role of sexual beast, Nana not only destroys but she also dirties: “Lorsqu’elle le [Muffat] tenait dans sa chambre, les portes closes, elle se donnait le régal de l’infamie de l’homme.”<sup>134</sup> She “faisait l’ours, à quatre pattes sur ses fourrures, en chemise, tournant avec des grognements, comme si elle avait voulu le dévorer” and makes Muffat imitate her: “il se mettait aussi à quatre pattes, grognait, lui mordait les mollets, pendant qu’elle se sauvait, en affectant des mines d’effroi.”<sup>135</sup> Nana ends these scenes by telling Muffat: “Sommes-nous bêtes, hein?,”<sup>136</sup> thus emphasizing their double natures both as stupid and as bestial. Muffat also has to take the role of a dog when “Elle lui jetait son mouchoir parfumé au bout de la pièce, et il devait courir le

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<sup>131</sup> Zola, *Nana* 381.

<sup>132</sup> Peter V. Conroy, Jr., “The Metaphorical Web in Zola’s *Nana*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 47.3 (1978): 256.

<sup>133</sup> Conroy 256.

<sup>134</sup> Zola, *Nana* 445.

<sup>135</sup> Zola, *Nana* 445.

<sup>136</sup> Zola, *Nana* 445.

ramasser avec les dents, en se traînant sur les mains et les genoux.”<sup>137</sup> Nana transfers her beastlike essence emanating from her sex to Muffat who enjoys being a brute. It is in these scenes that Nana’s masculine side occurs: “Dans son rapport avec les hommes, c’est elle qui domine en général, qui donne des ordres.”<sup>138</sup> Yet it is important to notice Nana’s double behavior in such scenes: on the one hand, she enjoys frolicking with Comte Muffat and on the other she seeks revenge on men. In the following description, the narrator makes clear that Nana is animal in spite of herself:

Mais ces petits jeux se gâtèrent bientôt. Ce ne fut pas cruauté chez elle, car elle demeurait bonne fille; ce fut comme un vent de démence qui passa et grandit peu à peu dans la chambre close. Une luxure les détraquait, les jetait aux imaginations délirantes de la chair. Les anciennes épouvantes dévotes de leur nuit d’insomnie tournaient maintenant en une soif de bestialité, une fureur de se mettre à quatre pattes, de grogner et de mordre. Puis, un jour, comme il faisait l’ours, elle le poussa si rudement, qu’il tomba contre un meuble; et elle éclata d’un rire involontaire, en lui envoyant une bosse au front. Dès lors, [...] elle le traita en animal, le fouailla, le poursuivit à coups de pied.<sup>139</sup>

Again like the goddess Circe, Nana has the power to transform man into a beast and to mark Comte Muffat with such a fascination that he keeps on paying for the hotel even if she receives other men in it. Dottin-Orsini quotes Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who advised men to “*ne*

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<sup>137</sup> Zola, *Nana* 446.

<sup>138</sup> Anna Gural-Migdal, “Nana, Figure de l’Entre et de l’Autre,” *Excavatio* 8 (1996): 20.

<sup>139</sup> Zola, *Nana* 446.

*s'endormir que d'un oeil*"<sup>140</sup> because "il y a dans la femme la plus charmante et la plus sérieuse de la sournoiserie, c'est-à-dire de la bête féroce. C'est, en définitive, un animal apprivoisé qui par moments revient à son instinct."<sup>141</sup> However Zola insists on the innocence of Nana's animal behavior, which is due to hereditary defects.

## 6.6. Nana at her Apogee

Nana becomes famous in her role of "charmeuse"<sup>142</sup> after she receives a sumptuous *hôtel* from Muffat. She reaches the Balzacian value of one million: "Elle grandit encore à l'horizon du vice, elle domine la ville de l'insolence affichée de son luxe, de son mépris de l'argent, qui lui faisait fondre publiquement les fortunes."<sup>143</sup> The femme fatale Renée also has such financial and even social value in being "une des colonnes du second Empire."<sup>144</sup> "Partout, aux Tuileries, chez les ministres, chez les simples millionnaires, en bas et en haut, [...] [Renée] règne en souveraine."<sup>145</sup> Indeed, like Renée, whose every dress is described in the press, Nana appears in newspapers and in store windows:

Nana devint une femme chic, rentière de la bêtise et de l'ordure des mâles, marquise des hauts trottoirs. [...] C'étaient des souplesses de couleuvre, un

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<sup>140</sup> Dottin-Orsini 265.

<sup>141</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La pornocratie* (Paris, 1875) 262.

<sup>142</sup> Zola, *Nana* 313.

<sup>143</sup> Zola, *Nana* 414.

<sup>144</sup> Zola, *Curée* 45.

<sup>145</sup> Zola, *Curée* 45.

déshabillé savant, comme involontaire, exquis d'élégance, une distinction nerveuse de chatte de race, une aristocratie du vice, superbe, révoltée, mettant le pied sur Paris, en maîtresse toute-puissante.<sup>146</sup>

Nana, who has a “menton de chatte,”<sup>147</sup> is thus clearly associated to the *chatte*, vulgarly denoting the female sex and to the snake symbolizing the darker side of sexuality. Nana's last theatrical role is that of Mélusine, the fairy, part serpent, part human, appearing in Jean d'Arras. Jonathan Krell notes that “The celebrated animality of Nana, a woman “something less than human,” her powerful hips and flowing hair inspiring in men the fear of the Beast and eliciting comparisons to the horse and the lion, recalls the animal nature of the fairy.”<sup>148</sup>

There are two specific points of view regarding Nana. For the male heroes, she is attractive and irresistible. She is a femme fatale who does not care for her victims: “un appétit de dépense toujours éveillé, un dédain naturel de l'homme qui payait, un continuel caprice de mangeuse et de gâcheuse, fière de la ruine de ses amants.”<sup>149</sup> The narrator also notes the destructive aspect of the myth, Nana in her function of devourer of men. She causes the ruin of Vandevres, Steiner, Muffat, La Faloise, Foucarmont and Fauchery as well as Georges Hugon's death and the imprisonment of his brother Philippe: “Nana, en quelques mois, les mangea goulûment, les uns après les autres. Les besoins croissants de son luxe enrageaient ses appétits,

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<sup>146</sup> Zola, *Nana* 313.

<sup>147</sup> Zola, *Nana* 303.

<sup>148</sup> Jonathan F. Krell, “Nana: Still Life, *Nature morte*,” *French Forum* 19.1 (1994) 71. See his article for further details on the comparison between Nana and the fairy Mélusine.

<sup>149</sup> Zola, *Nana* 317.

elle nettoyait un homme d'un coup de dent."<sup>150</sup> Fallen man becomes a fruit in putrefaction: "Un homme ruiné tombait de ses mains comme un fruit mûr, pour se pourrir à terre, de lui-même."<sup>151</sup> Man is contaminated by the fly carrying death and finishes in the same state as the rotting animal. Bertrand-Jennings interprets Nana's destructive power over men's lives as "une sorte de cannibalisme sexuel qui l'apparente à la mante religieuse."<sup>152</sup>

### 6.7. The End of the Femme Fatale

Society blames Nana for causing the ruin of her lovers, yet she claims that it is not her fault since they were all attracted to her and that ironically "je n'écraserais pas une mouche."<sup>153</sup> Yet at the end, Nana remains alone in the middle of her luxurious hotel with "un peuple d'hommes abattus à ses pieds."<sup>154</sup> The narrator notes that her social vengeance is legitimate: "Son oeuvre de ruine et de mort était faite, la mouche envolée de l'ordure des faubourgs, apportant le ferment des pourritures sociales, avait empoisonné ces hommes, rien qu'à se poser sur eux. C'était bien, c'était juste, elle avait vengé son monde, les gueux et les abandonnés."<sup>155</sup> Although Nana has made many men unhappy, the narrator underlines her human-animal innocence: "Et tandis que, dans une gloire, son sexe montait et rayonnait sur ses victimes étendues, pareil à un soleil levant

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<sup>150</sup> Zola, *Nana* 438-39.

<sup>151</sup> Zola, *Nana* 439.

<sup>152</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 65.

<sup>153</sup> Zola, *Nana* 455.

<sup>154</sup> Zola, *Nana* 457.

<sup>155</sup> Zola, *Nana* 457.

qui éclaire un champ de carnage, elle gardait son inconscience de bête superbe, ignorante de sa besogne, bonne fille toujours.”<sup>156</sup> Thus the narrator comments on Nana’s dual nature as both a beautiful, innocent animal and as a human being. Yet there is a final irony to the myth of the femme fatale: Nana contaminates herself. Indeed, her corpse has a strong smell and her face is horrible; only her hair remains beautiful: “Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l’avait pourri.”<sup>157</sup> For Gilman, “The decaying visage is the visible sign of the diseased genitalia through which the sexualized female corrupts an entire nation of warriors and leads them to the collapse of the French Army and the resultant German victory at Sedan.”<sup>158</sup> Finally, Alain Corbin recognizes the leitmotif linking the prostitute and human-animal cadaverous flesh: “All through the Latin Quarter’s dark alleys, [...] the dissection of cadavers, the flaying and dismembering of animals, and clandestine prostitution coalesce.”<sup>159</sup>

## 6.8. Conclusion

Rivers proposes an analysis of the scientific role of physiognomy in *Nana*, although I believe that physiognomy was not the naturalist author’s scientific project as the born-criminal was in

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<sup>156</sup> Zola, *Nana* 457.

<sup>157</sup> Zola, *Nana* 474-75.

<sup>158</sup> Gilman 235.

<sup>159</sup> Alain Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,” trans. K. Streip, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. Gallagher and T. Laqueur (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 211.

*Thérèse Raquin*. Rivers recognizes that the novel offers little physiognomical description of the characters, but he focuses on the centrality of Nana's body linking the physical and the moral and on the novel read "as a problematization of the act of physiognomical reading."<sup>160</sup> Thus "Nana is much less an object of physiognomical analysis than a subject who provokes physiognomical reactions in others"<sup>161</sup> as I have shown above in Muffat's bodily reactions. The reader of the novel has a perception of Nana through the eyes of her male suitors; therefore "it is not [...] a perception which includes specific facial features or other corporeal details of potential significance to a physiognomical reading"<sup>162</sup> because "male characters see Nana in terms of pure materiality and fail to recognize the need to read beyond her secondary sexual characteristics."<sup>163</sup> Rivers concludes that a physiognomical reading of the body is impossible and that "one might accurately say that the message of impossibility [...] of *Nana* is in direct contradiction to Zola's positivistic theory of the experimental novel."<sup>164</sup> Yet I agree with Mitterand who analyzes the differences between Zola's novels and his theoretical project introduced in *Le roman expérimental* and who rejects this type of comparison claiming that "ce serait une erreur de perspective de réduire le naturalisme à la théorie du roman expérimental, qui n'en fut ni l'idée maîtresse, ni l'idée constante, mais seulement une excroissance momentanée."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Rivers 184.

<sup>161</sup> Rivers 184.

<sup>162</sup> Rivers 187.

<sup>163</sup> Rivers 187.

<sup>164</sup> Rivers 191.

<sup>165</sup> Henri Mitterand, *Zola et le naturalisme*, Collection que sais-je? (Paris: PUF, 1986) 28-29.



On the other hand, Chantal Jennings views Zola in *Nana* as a destroyer of the myth of the fatal woman: “Loin de voir en la femme galante un monstre moral ou un ange de bonté, Zola lui concède une grande part d’innocence et lui reconnaît même certaines qualités des traditionnelles “femmes honnêtes.””<sup>166</sup> She also recognizes some inconsistencies in the fact that Zola attributes all the characteristics of the myth of the femme fatale to Nana, even the contradictory elements: “Le romancier lui reconnaît un pouvoir maléfique involontaire tout en lui faisant éprouver un plaisir sadique à tourmenter ses victimes.”<sup>167</sup> Jennings distinguishes three faces in the character Nana. Nana as “figure naturaliste, personnage pitoyable”<sup>168</sup> is irreconcilable with the “vision romantique, divinité inquiétante et dévastatrice.”<sup>169</sup> The third metamorphosis of Nana appears as “une allégorie de la vengeance, instrument inconscient de la revanche du peuple sur les classes dirigeantes qui l’oppriment.”<sup>170</sup> Schor also underlines this third aspect of Nana, who “avenges the poor, carrying her heritage of corruption into the highest spheres of society.”<sup>171</sup> I think that these opposed aspects of Nana as well as her three faces described by Jennings are components of her enigmatic nature in the same way as her undecided human-animal status discussed above.

Sandy Petrey analyzes Nana using the theory of performance, which implies “une représentation organisée non pas par l’appareil génital de la personne qui la réalise mais par

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<sup>166</sup> Chantal Jennings, “Les trois visages de Nana,” spec. issue of *The French Review* 0.2 (1971): 119.

<sup>167</sup> Jennings 123.

<sup>168</sup> Jennings 127.

<sup>169</sup> Jennings 127.

<sup>170</sup> Jennings 127.

<sup>171</sup> Naomi Schor, *Zola’s Crowds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978) 167.

l'idéologie de la société dans laquelle la performance a lieu."<sup>172</sup> Petrey thus links this notion of performance to the theatrical aspect of Nana's sexuality. He also believes that performance has a more important role than biology in the novel: "il n'y [a] rien de naturel dans le désir qui s'empare de Muffat. Ce qui éveille sa sexualité, ce sont les yeux trop grands, la face trop blanche, la bouche trop rouge – une performance au lieu d'une personne."<sup>173</sup> I would say that both the notion of performance and of natural biology play major roles in the novel and reflect Nana's ambiguous status between human and animal, between unscrupulous femme fatale and *bonne fille*. We have seen that Nature appears in the animal subtext; for instance, Nana blames Nature when she gets pregnant: "La nature l'exaspérait, cette maternité grave qui se levait dans son plaisir, cette vie donnée au milieu de toutes les morts qu'elle semait autour d'elle."<sup>174</sup> Indeed, pregnancy stops animals' periods of being in heat, which explains Nana's consternation at her pregnancy, since it would have prevented her from fulfilling her role of femme fatale, from being in heat while performing in the bedroom. With regards to the notion introduced by Petrey, performance is a crucial element of Nana as fatal woman as we have seen in the bedroom scenes: she definitely plays a theatrical role to attract men. Indeed it is not Nature that leads men to her but her flirting performance as well as her external appearance crucial to the former. For Jean Baudrillard, *parure* serves as a link between animality and femininity. In the animal world, seduction is an instinctive ritual: "C'est chez les animaux que la séduction prend la forme la plus pure, dans le sens que la parade séductrice semble chez eux comme gravée dans l'instinct,

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<sup>172</sup> Sandy Petrey, "Anna-Nana-Nana: identité sexuelle, écriture naturaliste, lectures lesbiennes," *Les Cahiers Naturalistes* 41 (1995): 70.

<sup>173</sup> Petrey 78.

<sup>174</sup> Zola, *Nana* 389.

comme immédiate dans des comportements réflexes et des parures naturelles.”<sup>175</sup> I believe that seduction is highly feminine in novels such as *Nana* with femmes fatales as main characters. Thus Nana’s *parure*, which is part of her performance, has an animal origin and serves to link theatricality to biology, seduction to sexuality, make-up to the scented body and to a certain extent animality to humanity.

In conclusion, I have shown, in the introduction to the femme fatale, not only the inherent animality in Carmen or Baudelaire’s women but also the remarkable eminence of protagonists like Salammbô and Salomé. As to the fatal woman in Zola, both Renée and Nana are punished at the end: the former goes crazy after realizing the shame attached to her being a femme fatale, while the latter, after contaminating men with her animality, ironically dies of a contagious disease. Nana’s incessant movements across the human and the animal border underscore her ambiguous status as a human being and designate her enigmatic nature. On the other hand, Nana expresses a truth about men. In becoming close to Nana, who is neither fully human nor fully female, men externalize an animal part of themselves they usually do not allow themselves to express. Nana is a femme fatale because she reveals to men this truth they love.

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<sup>175</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1979) 122.

## 7. Toward a Utopian New Society: Lantier's and Froment's Battle against the Human Animal

### 7.1. Etienne Lantier and his Fight against the Animalized Worker

The miners of *Germinal* are often referred to in animal terms: “Zola emphasizes the brutality of the miners’ lives and their submission to it by repeatedly characterizing them as a herd of animals. At work below ground, they become ants or moles.”<sup>1</sup> Etienne distinguishes himself from his underprivileged co-workers, who are totally unable to reflect and to express themselves, by his eloquence. Maheu is the first to notice that “ce garçon [Etienne] avait une instruction supérieure à la sienne: il le voyait lire, écrire, dessiner des bouts de plan, il l’entendait causer de choses dont, lui, ignorait jusqu’à l’existence.”<sup>2</sup> Etienne is revolted that miners are so badly paid for such difficult and life-endangering work. He is indoctrinated by the International Working Men’s Association in the struggle of labor against capital and convinces his fellow workers to create a contingency fund, which could be an appreciated financial help in times of crisis. Etienne feels embarrassed by his lack of knowledge regarding equity and the equality of all men. Besides his regular correspondence with Pluchart, he takes to studying with books sent to him such as medical studies on miners, treatises on political economy, anarchist pamphlets and works on co-operative societies. His intellect is thus transformed: “La honte de son ignorance s’en allait, il lui venait un orgueil, depuis qu’il se sentait penser.”<sup>3</sup>

Etienne becomes secretary of the workers’ association and thus a big man around *Le Voreux*. His vanity is excited by his growing popularity: “Il montait d’un échelon, il entrait dans cette bourgeoisie exécrée, avec des satisfactions d’intelligence et de bien-être, qu’il ne s’avouait

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<sup>1</sup> Diane M. Smith, “The Evolution of the Working Class Novel in Europe: Darwinian Science and Literary Naturalism,” *Excavatio* 8 (1996): 76.

<sup>2</sup>Emile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 187.

<sup>3</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 217.

pas.”<sup>4</sup> He acquires a different political status from the miners because of his role as their spokesman. Etienne is the one to parley with Deneulin, the owner of a neighboring mine. When the miners are on strike, Etienne leads a group to discuss new conditions with M. Hennebeau, the director of *Le Voreux*. It is interesting that Maheu, who cannot read, finds his voice and expresses himself well in negotiating with M. Hennebeau. Maheu has been used to listening to Etienne’s argumentation over the past weeks, and this fact is clearly significant in his sudden appropriation of *la parole*. Yet, at the end of their discussion, Maheu’s tongue becomes awkward again. Etienne is not only the organizer of the members’ meetings but also the leader of a secret meeting in the forest, at which miners, suffering from extreme misery, decide to continue to strike. Etienne’s plan is clearly to attenuate the animalistic aspect of the human miner: “le mineur n’était plus l’ignorant, la brute écrasée dans les entrailles du sol.”<sup>5</sup> Most of the miners cannot read: when the mine manager makes an important written announcement regarding their salary, they ask Etienne to read the notice. At the meeting in the forest, Etienne is listened to with attention, yet his ideas are not totally grasped by the crowd: “Bien des phrases obscures leur [les hommes, les femmes] avaient échappé, ils n’entendaient guère ces raisonnements techniques et abstraits; mais l’obscurité même, l’abstraction élargissait encore le champ des promesses, les enlevait dans un éblouissement.”<sup>6</sup> Etienne is not only intellectually superior to the miners but also sexually superior since he is not in constant heat: “The mine reduces the miners to the level of animals, [...] it is the most natural thing in the world for Zola’s miners to be in perpetual state

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<sup>4</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 282.

<sup>5</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 347.

<sup>6</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 343.

of rut.”<sup>7</sup> Etienne’s intellect puts him above the common miners: he is not pejoratively described as an animal in contrast to Maheu who incarnates the ox. Jeanlin’s description is also extremely animalistic and worth underlining in contrast with Etienne’s: “avec son museau, ses yeux verts, ses grandes oreilles, dans sa dégénérescence d’avorton, à l’intelligence obscure et d’une ruse de sauvage, lentement repris par l’animalité ancienne.”<sup>8</sup> Etienne moves above and beyond animality as a bearer of *la parole*: his appropriation of speech marks his humanity in contrast with the miners whose animal side predominates.

After the procession degenerates into unnecessary violence, Etienne feels the need to live in hiding. He thus becomes a legendary figure among the miners. It is at this time that he is aware of his intellectual superiority over his fellows due to his constant instruction. However he loses courage in his project and regrets his fellows’ stupidity:

Quelle nausée, ces misérables en tas, vivant au baquet commun! Pas un avec qui causer politique sérieusement, une existence de bétail, toujours le même air empesté d’oignon où l’on étouffait! Il voulait leur élargir le ciel, les élever au bien-être et aux bonnes manières de la bourgeoisie, en faisant d’eux les maîtres; mais comme ce serait long!<sup>9</sup>

When Etienne resurfaces from his hiding place, he notices that he is seen as the cause of the miners’ misfortunes and is accused of being an assassin and exploiter. He once again feels that he is above the miners who resemble animals needing control: “il traitait maintenant les

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<sup>7</sup> W.H. Wardman, “Thought and Literature in France: Montaigne to Zola; Man and the Animal World,” *Universitas* 6.1 (1977): 65.

<sup>8</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 331.

<sup>9</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 437-38.

camarades de brutes, il s'irritait de les voir inintelligents et barbares [...]. Un dégoût lui venait de son impuissance à les dompter de nouveau.”<sup>10</sup> At the end of the novel, Etienne leaves Montsou matured and educated by his experience in the mine. For instance, he has read Darwin, if only superficially: “de cette lecture mal comprise, il se faisait une idée révolutionnaire du combat pour l'existence, les maigres mangeant les gras, le peuple fort dévorant la blême bourgeoisie.”<sup>11</sup> He is now a “soldat raisonneur de la révolution”<sup>12</sup> at war with society.

## 7.2. Etienne Versus Chaval in Terms of Subjectivity

Etienne and Chaval represent the human and the animal respectively in their relationship with Catherine. The former, as master of *parole*, impresses Catherine with ideas for a better future, while the latter treats her in a brutal way and has little genteel dialogue with her. Catherine is fascinated by Etienne at the beginning of the novel but Chaval uses this rivalry to keep her under closer control. Chaval's name sounds like a combination of *chacal*, a cunning animal taking advantage of others' victories and *cheval*, an animal symbolizing “instinctive impulses.”<sup>13</sup> Both men fight twice for Catherine; the second time is fatal to Chaval and occurs when the three of them are trapped underneath the earth. Etienne makes love to Catherine a few moments before she dies of exhaustion; he is the first and last man to take her as a menstruating and thus

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<sup>10</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 507.

<sup>11</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 513.

<sup>12</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 590.

<sup>13</sup> Nadia Julien, *The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Elfreda Powell (New York: Carroll & Graf publishers, 1996) 207.

reproductively mature woman. Since Chaval's name announces the instinctive animal, it is not astonishing that he is very active sexually. On the other hand, Etienne and Catherine's bodies are not determined by animal heat: they are passionately and secretly in love with each other. Chaval adequately illustrates the following quote from Zola's correspondence: "L'homme vraiment vil est celui dont le corps seul règne; celui-là, flétrissez-le de toute votre indignation."<sup>14</sup> Thus Chaval cannot acquire political subjectivity since brutal satisfaction of his animal instincts is his main reason for living. In contrast, Etienne Lantier is primarily a political subject because he takes part in a process of truth, namely in a process of social justice for miners. His political involvement underlines a fidelity, a leap of faith over the inescapable uncertainty of the efficiency of the social changes for which he militates. His constant use of *parole* reveals truth. He is acting independently to improve the conditions of life for the working class; it is a process of truth similar to Zola's in the Dreyfus affair. Thus Etienne goes beyond his animal instincts by being a political subject. The only drawback is that he cannot prevent himself from violently killing his rival Chaval. Yet this act can be cleared by his process of truth needed to acquire amorous subjectivity: to be a total human subject, Etienne has to eliminate Chaval, the brutish animal that puts Catherine's life in constant danger.

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<sup>14</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. B.H. Bakker, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherche Scientifique & Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978-95) 205.



### 7.3. Etienne Lantier: Luc Froment's Predecessor

Etienne stands out as the “chef de bande, l’apôtre apportant la vérité.”<sup>15</sup> In his dream of equality and justice, Etienne imagines a new society free of misery and injustice, in which workers lose their function of sacrificed animal. He thus foreshadows Luc Froment in *Travail*:

L'éternel recommencement de la misère, le travail de brute, ce destin de bétail qui donne sa laine et qu'on égorge, tout le malheur disparaissait, comme balayé par un grand coup de soleil; et, sous un éblouissement de féerie, la justice descendait du ciel. Puisque le bon Dieu était mort, la justice allait assurer le bonheur des hommes, en faisant régner l'égalité et la fraternité. Une société nouvelle poussait en un jour, ainsi que dans les songes, une ville immense, d'une splendeur de mirage, où chaque citoyen vivait de sa tâche et prenait sa part des joies communes.<sup>16</sup>

In *Travail*, the second volume of the *Quatre évangiles* series published in 1901, Zola presents a utopian society where men are equal and where the animal side of the human is considerably reduced. In a letter to Octave Mirbeau in 1899, Zola admits that his last works are utopian and this for the following reason: “Voici quarante ans que je dissèque, il faut bien permettre à mes vieux jours de rêver un peu.”<sup>17</sup> Thus Zola wants to go beyond scrutinizing the animal layer of the human in *Travail*. Like Lantier who becomes a political subject by fighting for human animals, Luc Froment is the messiah announcing a new era with a mission of truth, justice and happiness

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<sup>15</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 340.

<sup>16</sup> Zola, *Germinal* 221.

<sup>17</sup> Emile Zola, *Correspondance: les lettres et les arts* (Paris: Charpentier, 1908) 347.

in the small village of Beauclair. Described as an apostle, he has a dream: the foundation of the *Cité heureuse* by associating capital, work and talent. At the beginning of the novel, he notices that the working class lives in terrible financial and moral conditions: hard work turns man into a brute. The iron and steel factories of *La Crêcherie* are comparable to the monstrous animal function of *Le Voreux* in *Germinal*. Before the reorganization of society into the *Cité heureuse*, inequality transforms the population into animals, men into wolves eating each other and women into either beasts of burden or lustful prostitutes:

Une telle iniquité, d'une part, l'oisiveté regorgeant de biens, de l'autre, le douloureux travail agonisant de misère, avait fait de l'homme un loup pour l'homme. Au lieu de s'unir pour vaincre et domestiquer les forces de la nature, les hommes s'entre-dévorait, le barbare pacte social les jetait à la haine, à l'erreur, à la folie, abandonnant l'enfant et le vieillard, écrasant la femme, bête de somme ou chair à plaisir. Les travailleurs eux-mêmes, corrompus par l'exemple, acceptaient leur servage, la tête basse sous l'universelle lâcheté.<sup>18</sup>

Workers can only move in the direction of the *Cité heureuse* when they realize that it is unacceptable to tear one another to pieces like beasts. In contrast, the upper classes do not know how to make their lives idler and wealthier. After experiencing these two different worlds, Luc makes a crucial decision:

Il avait vu les deux faces de cet exécration monde, dont la charpente craquait de pourriture: la misère inique des uns, la richesse empoisonneuse des autres. Le travail, mal payé, méprisé, distribué injustement, n'était plus qu'une torture et une

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<sup>18</sup> Emile Zola, *Travail* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1901) 202.

honte, lorsqu'il aurait dû être la noblesse, la santé, le bonheur même de l'homme. Son coeur éclatait, son cerveau s'ouvrait, sous l'idée à naître, dont il se sentait gros depuis des mois. Et c'était un cri de justice qui jaillissait de son être entier, et il n'y avait d'autre mission, aujourd'hui, que d'aller au secours des misérables et de refaire un peu de justice sur la terre.<sup>19</sup>

#### **7.4. Fourier and Letourneau in *Travail***

For the foundation of the *Cité heureuse*, Luc is inspired by Charles Fourier and his evolutionary doctrine associating capital, work and intelligence to attain universal harmony. The publication of *Travail* was celebrated by a banquet organized in Zola's honor by the disciples of Fourier and some working associations. Fourier's main arguments are that man's passions should be used efficiently as forces of life: "il n'y a pas de passions mauvaises dans l'être humain, il n'y a que des énergies, car les passions sont toutes des forces admirables, et il s'agit uniquement de les utiliser pour le bonheur des individus et de la communauté,"<sup>20</sup> and that work should be honored again as the main law of life. In other words, passions are positive and good in the new society of *Travail*, to such a point that repressed animal instincts totally disintegrate into the final harmony: "Les instincts, refoulés, écrasés jusqu'ici, ainsi que des bêtes mauvaises, ne seraient plus, libérés enfin, que les besoins de l'universelle attraction tendant à l'unité, travaillant parmi les obstacles à se fondre dans l'harmonie finale, expression définitive de l'universel bonheur."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>19</sup> Zola, *Travail* 128-29.

<sup>20</sup> Zola, *Travail* 543.

<sup>21</sup> Zola, *Travail* 172.

according to Fourier, the equilibrium of passions is crucial to human happiness but it cannot be modeled on Nature:

Everyone would like to keep his passions in a state of equilibrium such that the expression of a single passion would facilitate the expression of all the others. Under such conditions ambition and love would lead only to the formation of fruitful relationships and never to disappointments; gluttony would promote good health instead of ruining it; and in general people would acquire wealth and health in abandoning themselves blindly to their passions. This sort of equilibrium, which comes from an unthinking surrender to nature, is granted to the animals and denied to the civilized man, the barbarian and the savage. Passion benefits the animal, but it leads man to his ruin. Thus man is at present in a state of war with himself. [...] The aim is to achieve the spontaneous coordination of the passions without repressing any of them....<sup>22</sup>

Fourier presents a new amorous regime, in which love stands as the main passion and in which a proper balance between sentiment and sensual love must be maintained. If physical love occurs without sentiment, man returns to his animal status:

Physical love, which is called brutish, animal, etc., is degraded by civilized legislation and morality as an obstacle to the conjugal system. When it is not

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Boston: Beacon, 1971) 217-18.

allied with sentimental love, it is regarded as a vile passion which reduces us to the level of the animals. Nothing is more true.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, Fourier argues that it is important to fulfill one's sexual needs: "Only by satisfying the need for physical love, will it become possible to guarantee the development of the noble element in love."<sup>24</sup> Universal love is thus the agent whereby family, nation and humanity are made larger and happier: "l'apôtre en lui [Luc] ne pouvait pas rester infécond, il avait besoin d'une femme pour racheter l'humanité."<sup>25</sup> Luc's union of love with Josine, the unhappily married worker, shows that only love can be a harmonious force in the utopian society and that communion with the disinherited is crucial. The baby produced in love lies at the foundation of the *Cité heureuse*, in which mother and child are worshipped: "On ne fonde rien sans l'enfant, il est l'oeuvre vivante, élargissant et propageant la vie, continuant aujourd'hui par demain."<sup>26</sup> Fecundity is indeed an important part of love: "C'était le torrent d'amour, la vie qui s'élargissait sans cesse, décuplant les moissons, faisant toujours pousser plus d'hommes pour plus de vérité et plus de justice."<sup>27</sup> According to Frederick Case, this emphasis on fecundity liberates woman from one of her degrading roles, often perceived as animal: "il [Zola] fait de la fécondité l'un des facteurs qui amènent la femme à se libérer d'un de ses rôles traditionnels et humiliants – celui

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<sup>23</sup> Fourier 336.

<sup>24</sup> Fourier 340.

<sup>25</sup> Zola, *Travail* 289.

<sup>26</sup> Zola, *Travail* 378.

<sup>27</sup> Zola, *Travail* 522.

d'objet de plaisir dont on se sert et dont on se débarrasse à volonté.”<sup>28</sup> The *Cité heureuse* becomes united when families are mixed into a unique entity. There is no law governing marriage: every citizen is free in his choice of a life partner. Reconciliation between the classes occurs when grooms marry brides of a different social class than their own. These marriages symbolize the disappearance of social demarcation and the equal union of work and capital. They also announce harmony in the bringing together of classes before final peacefulness.

Zola is also influenced by Charles Letourneau's principles regarding the regulation of this new society. In *La physiologie des passions*, Letourneau also hints at a utopian intellectual phase where “Les nobles besoins intellectuels et les besoins moraux les plus élevés, qui d'abord ont été le glorieux apanage de quelques individus exceptionnels, deviennent et deviendront de plus en plus communs, de plus en plus forts.”<sup>29</sup> War, superstition and violence would disappear, and man would be noble, independent and dignified in a happy and perfectible society. Letourneau thinks that this revolution of ideas is necessary: man should be as far as possible from instinctive needs and as close as possible to intellectual summits for society's sake.

## **7.5. Luc Froment and Subjectivity**

After pondering human nature, Luc realizes the need to make men into humans, into Badiou's Immortal beings rather than into mere animals. Luc creates a new iron and steel factory, in which workers alternate their jobs and in which production is collective. In the *Cité ouvrière*, families

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick Ivor Case, *La Cité idéale dans Travail d'Emile Zola*, University of Toronto Romance Series 27 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974) 85.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Letourneau, *La physiologie des passions* (Paris, 1868) 54.

have their own little houses with gardens. At the middle of it all, there is the *Maison-Commune* where schools, libraries, game and bathing areas as well as a space for meetings and parties are found. In the *Magasins-Généraux*, food, clothes and other useful objects are to be purchased. Luc is helped by three women in his project: Soeurette, Jordan's sister, who is deeply in love with him; Suzanne, Luc's good friend for years and a recent widow of a bourgeois factory owner, and Josine, his lover, his woman, his "fleur de beauté et de désir."<sup>30</sup> Woman thus definitely plays a crucial role: "C'était par la femme et pour la femme que la Cité nouvelle devait être fondée."<sup>31</sup> In his evolutionary project, Luc is helped financially by his friend Jordan who believes that science can bring men to truth, justice and happiness. Jordan believes in scientific improvement of labor as an access to a possibly better level of life. He is foreshadowed by Docteur Pascal who believes that "l'avenir de l'humanité est dans le progrès de la raison par la science. Je crois que la poursuite de la vérité par la science est l'idéal divin que l'homme doit se proposer."<sup>32</sup> Jordan, of delicate health, embodies the ideal of the technical scientist: he spends long hours in his laboratory conducting various electrical experiments. Denise Le Blond-Zola writes that he incarnates an admirable "Darwin « maladif et faible »."<sup>33</sup>

After three years, the population of *La Crêcherie* has doubled, and there is a rapid and successful progression: Luc even succeeds in associating the farmers of the neighboring village to the workers of his happy society. Yet Luc, in becoming a political subject à la Badiou, has struggled for many years and has overcome obstacles such as a trial, attacks and a murder

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<sup>30</sup> Zola, *Travail* 467.

<sup>31</sup> Zola, *Travail* 467.

<sup>32</sup> Emile Zola, *Le docteur Pascal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) 97-98.

<sup>33</sup> Denise Le Blond-Zola, *Zola raconté par sa fille* (Paris: Grasset, 2000) 264.

attempt. He believes from the onset of his social reform that these political changes will create a better world; however he has no proof of its possible success and he makes a leap of faith over this inescapable uncertainty. It is this fidelity which makes him become a political subject. The composition of his subjectivity exceeds Luc and this excess makes him become an Immortal being.

The *Cité heureuse* brings a new subjectivity into existence: “la libre expansion de l’individu, [...] une société de satisfaction complète, l’homme étant tout l’homme et vivant toute la vie.”<sup>34</sup> At the end of the novel, Luc, more than eighty years of age, is encircled by a halo and is “le Fondateur, le Créateur, le Père”<sup>35</sup> of a solid and successful enterprise. He rejoices in his victory over misery and still hopes for a future of higher justice and equality. Brian Nelson believes that Zola has recourse to the myth of the New Man in Luc: “The New Man who comes to restore order, to rebuild and redeem, arrives not as a working-class militant but as a bourgeois reformer.”<sup>36</sup> Luc, representing the bourgeoisie, changes society individually as Zola did in the Dreyfus affair. Although Zola seems to eradicate class differences in the *Cité heureuse*, Luc still appears as a bourgeois for Nelson:

[H]is [Zola’s] utopian society [...] is grounded in the traditional bourgeois values of work, moderation and order, as well as in his faith in the natural forces of fecundity, scientific progress and a liberal education. Thus the apparent paradox emerges that the nineteenth-century writer who aroused the greatest hostility and

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<sup>34</sup> Zola, *Travail* 641.

<sup>35</sup> Zola, *Travail* 616.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Nelson, “Zola and the Ideology of Messianism,” *Orbis Litterarum* 37 (1982): 76.



fear among bourgeois readers and critics was himself, in some significant respects, profoundly bourgeois.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, for Nelson, Zola believes in the traditional bourgeois values and “his satire is directed against the bourgeois as parasite.”<sup>38</sup> The naturalist author remains conservative in spite of his belief in justice and science: “Zola suggests [...] that the answer to the problems of France is not revolution but conservatism.”<sup>39</sup>

#### **7.6. Tarde’s Notion of Imitation in *Travail***

Major changes occur in the *Cité heureuse*. Money and taxes are eradicated; courts and prisons are closed; crime no longer exists; the system of punishment and rewards of the Catholic church is not necessary. The treasury is public and four hours a day of work per inhabitant suffice to accumulate prodigious wealth and to satisfy citizens’ desires. Every citizen of the *Cité heureuse* is thus equally rich; the concept of heredity seems refused since the notion of inheritance is suppressed. Parasites such as government employees, functionaries, magistrates, military and idle people are no longer a reality. The old notion of authority has totally disappeared. People are now instructed in truth and in a new system of education led by the notion of imitation, since “l’être social, en tant que social, est imitateur par essence.”<sup>40</sup> In the preface to the second edition

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<sup>37</sup> Nelson 81.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Nelson, “Zola’s Ideology: The Road to Utopia,” *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. David Baguley (Boston: Hall, 1986) 168.

<sup>39</sup> Nelson, *Zola’s Ideology* 168.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l’imitation* (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2001) 71.

of *Les lois de l'imitation*, Gabriel Tarde recognizes a link between his notion of imitation and naturalism: the laws of heredity complement the laws of imitation for three reasons. First of all “si le fait social est un rapport d’imitation, le *lien* social, le *groupe* social, est à la fois imitatif et héréditaire.”<sup>41</sup> Members of the community of *La Crêcherie*, which is a “foyer de rayonnements imitatifs”<sup>42</sup> inherit their social duties. Secondly, “l’invention [...] n’est pas à mes yeux un fait purement social dans sa source: elle naît de la rencontre du génie individuel, [...] avec des courants et des rayonnements d’imitation qui se sont croisés un jour dans un cerveau plus ou moins exceptionnel.”<sup>43</sup> In *Travail*, through his theoretical and political readings, Luc Froment is the exceptional mind behind a social and imitative project. Finally, “en ce qui concerne l’imitation, non seulement j’ai reconnu l’influence du *milieu vital* où elle se propage en réfractant, [...] mais encore, en posant la loi du retour normal de la mode à la coutume, de l’enracinement coutumier et traditionnel des innovations, n’ai-je pas donné encore une fois à l’imitation pour soutien nécessaire l’hérédité?”<sup>44</sup> As in naturalist fiction, the environment and heredity have a crucial influence on the individual’s life in Tarde’s system, in which there occurs hereditary transmission of social customs from generation to generation. Yet in Zola’s social utopia, the tradition of inheritance is suppressed; the naturalist author thus moves away from naturalism and the notion of heredity, which is a consequence of the constant use of imitation:

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<sup>41</sup> Tarde 53.

<sup>42</sup> Tarde 79.

<sup>43</sup> Tarde 54.

<sup>44</sup> Tarde 54.

“Nous savons, en effet, que la forme sociale de la Répétition, l’imitation, tend à s’affranchir de plus en plus de la forme vivante, l’hérédité.”<sup>45</sup>

### 7.7. The Machine as Agent of De-Animalization

After long years of constant research in his laboratory, Jordan discovers how to carry electrical force without loss and to transform coal energy into electrical power. Before dying, Jordan produces electricity from solar energy. Science is revolutionary and moves man toward mastery: “La science, la vérité seule émancipera l’homme toujours davantage, le fera le maître de sa destinée, lui donnera la souveraineté du monde, en réduisant les forces naturelles au rôle de dociles servantes [...]”<sup>46</sup> Every day it advances to create more fraternity, happiness and knowledge and to conquer Nature. Tarde describes such a type of invention in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms: “L’invention est le rapport [...] des courants hétérogènes et infinitésimaux des connaissances, des volontés et des affects qui coulent sur le corps sans organes du cerveau collectif, véritable *socius* des forces psychologiques.”<sup>47</sup> Mechanics replaces manual labor to the point that it removes the animal side of the hard-working man and revolutionizes the conception of the human as animal:

Enfin, depuis la ménagère jusqu’à l’ouvrier de l’usine, l’antique bête humaine était peu à peu soustraite à l’effort physique, d’une douleur inutile, maintenant qu’une force naturelle conquise, domestiquée, la remplaçait, propre et silencieuse,

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<sup>45</sup> Tarde 441.

<sup>46</sup> Zola, *Travail* 632-33.

<sup>47</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l’invention: la psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l’économie politique* (Paris: les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2002) 52.

sous une simple surveillance. Et c'était l'intelligence affranchie, une hausse morale et intellectuelle de tous les cerveaux, déprimés jusque-là sous le travail trop rude, mal réparti, d'une iniquité sauvage pour l'immense foule des déshérités, voués à l'ignorance, à la bassesse et au crime. Et c'était, non pas l'oisive paresse, mais un travail plus conscient et plus libre, l'homme véritablement roi du travail, se donnant aux occupations aimées, créant à sa guise plus de vérité et de beauté, après les quelques heures de besogne commune, données à la communauté sociale. Et c'était même les tristes bêtes domestiques, les chevaux dolents, tous les animaux de trait et de servage, libérés enfin du chariot à traîner, de la meule à tourner, des fardeaux à porter, rendus à l'existence heureuse des prairies et des bois.<sup>48</sup>

Zola eliminates brutal work as depicted in *Germinal* from the perfect society. Even animals are no longer viewed as beasts of burden and are liberated, which drastically reduces animality in the working human.

### **7.8. Illusory Disappearance of *l'Autre***

As to the battle of the sexes, the situation seems favorable at first sight in the *Cité heureuse*:

L'âpre duel de l'homme et de la femme, toutes les questions qui, pendant si longtemps, avaient dressé les deux sexes l'un devant l'autre, en ennemis sauvages, irréconciliables, se trouvaient très facilement résolues par cette solution

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<sup>48</sup> Zola, *Travail* 633-34.

de la femme libérée en toutes choses, redevenue la compagne libre de l'homme, reprenant sa place d'égale et d'indispensable dans le couple d'amour. Elle pouvait ne pas se marier, vivre en homme, remplir en tout et partout le rôle d'un homme; mais à quoi bon se mutiler, nier le désir, se mettre à part de la vie? Il n'est qu'une raison, qu'une beauté, et c'est toute la vie, le plus de vie possible. Aussi l'ordre naturel s'était-il bientôt établi de lui-même, la paix s'était faite, là aussi, entre les sexes réconciliés, trouvant chacun son bonheur dans le bonheur du ménage, goûtant enfin les délices du lien d'amour, débarrassé des bassesses de l'argent et des convenances.<sup>49</sup>

Woman is man's equal according to the narrator but at a deeper level it is clear that masculinity still triumphs. As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings shows, Luc's role as a patriarchal figure is to subdue the woman, Josine, whom he has just saved: "il s'agira plus ouvertement d'entreprendre la pacification systématique de la gent féminine, soit par une insertion exemplaire dans la société patriarcale, soit par un accaparement qui rend mien."<sup>50</sup> Josine is not Luc's equal, since she adores him as a god-like figure. Feminine functions such as "maternité et soutien masculin" serve to glorify the "Moi viril."<sup>51</sup> Bertrand-Jennings also underlines polygamous tendencies in this utopian patriarchal society: Josine, Soeurette and Suzanne share Luc's love. In Zola's final works, Bertrand-Jennings perceives a continuation of the mythical theory of impregnation symbolized by Pygmalion: "On reconnaît là [dans l'imprégnation] une forme du mythe de

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<sup>49</sup> Zola, *Travail* 648-49.

<sup>50</sup> Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L'éros et la femme chez Zola* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977) 117.

<sup>51</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 118-19.

Pygmalion, un rêve de démiurge cher à l'imagination masculine et qui se précisera peu à peu au long des romans zoliens pour éclater avec vigueur dans les derniers écrits messianiques."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Luc marks Josine and sees her as the image of his work, of his own creation. Bertrand-Jennings concludes on the relation between "le Moi" and "l'Autre" in Zola's messianic novels: "Ainsi le Moi a non seulement réussi à se substituer à Dieu dans la création de l'être, mais encore il a accompli la prouesse de s'être débarrassé de l'Autre en l'annihilant pour la supplanter."<sup>53</sup> Henri Mitterand also sees Luc's patriarchal society as a *mise en abyme* of the novelist as patriarch.<sup>54</sup> Case views woman as excluded from Zola's project of justice: "Mais si Zola parle très vaguement et subjectivement de 'la loi naturelle de vérité et d'équité,' il vise une justice restreinte qui n'est pas à la portée des femmes, dont la condition dépendra toujours de l'homme."<sup>55</sup> In the plot of *Travail*, Zola's masculine preference goes against Fourier who is in favor of woman's liberation and sexual freedom. It may be the case that Zola simply rewrites Fourier's ideas and then contradicts himself with his plot. Indeed Philip Walker sees Zola as "an extraordinarily strange prophet:" "he is constantly contradicting himself, erasing with one hand what he writes with the other, a mercurial prophet proclaiming not just one new faith, but multiple clashing faiths, a prophet alternately or simultaneously dejected and ecstatic, a prophet habitually torn between belief and doubt, hope and despair."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 123.

<sup>53</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 126.

<sup>54</sup> Henri Mitterand, "Le quatrième Zola," *Oeuvres et Critiques* 16 (1991): 96.

<sup>55</sup> Case 83.

<sup>56</sup> Philip D. Walker, "Zola: Poet of an Age of World Destruction and Renewal," *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. David Baguley (Boston: Hall, 1986) 184.

In contrast with the Rougon-Macquart series in which feminine sexuality is often linked to evil and death, woman is valorized in *Les quatre évangiles*, but under the condition that her sexual desires are totally negated: “la femme n’est valorisée chez Zola que tronquée, amputée de son sexe et de son moi, simple reflet du Moi viril, insérée parfaitement dans le carcan de la société patriarcale qui permet la protection efficace contre ses « maléfices », tout en assurant le triomphe du principe masculin.”<sup>57</sup> In the *Cité heureuse*, humans are no longer viewed as animals in the working and sexual contexts: they do not labor like beasts of burden and they are not in rut. In this new society, production is recorded on the surface of the socius. In Deleuze and Guattari’s world, the socius is involved in social and desiring production as a full body of antiproduction. Its prime function is to mark bodies and to inscribe, record and regulate flows of desire. We see in *Travail* that bodies are completely appropriated, and almost made irrelevant, by the socius (in this case *La Crêcherie*), since the notion of desire seems to have disappeared and sexual deviations do not occur as frequently as before. It is remarkable that Zola does not have crude descriptions of sexual relations in the new society. This shows that the subject has been processed beyond animality. The subject is controlled by the socius, whose functioning is through the notion of imitation and “la passivité imitative de l’être social.”<sup>58</sup> This aptitude to imitation reveals the plasticity of man, and for David Baguley, “Il crée un monde, euphorique et totalitaire, dans lequel tout est réglé, rythmé et uniformisé à un tel degré que toute distinction est systématiquement éliminée et tous les êtres deviennent parfaitement interchangeables.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bertrand-Jennings 129.

<sup>58</sup> Tarde 139.

<sup>59</sup> David Baguley, “Du récit polémique au discours utopique: l’Evangile républicain de Zola,” *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 54 (1980):120.

## 7.9. Zola the Prophet

With *Les quatre évangiles*, Zola gives an approach to the end of the century which is different from decadence. As Mitterand argues, the reader should not interpret these works as purely utopian: the naturalist author makes true predictions for the years to come at the end of *Travail*. He becomes a modern Nostradamus. While the little village of Beauclair has few struggles thanks to its new associative society, massacres are under way in other states: communists have become masters of a great Republic; anarchists have reformed a neighboring empire; and a horrible war has divided Europe and caused millions of victims. According to Mitterand, this last prediction is the most startling because it anticipates the First World War and its aftermath. Finally, it seems that contradictions subtly appear in Zola's *Travail*. For instance, biblical imagery and metaphors are very frequent in *Travail*: in his role of prophet, Luc Froment is seen as the new Messiah. Yet this Christian presence is strangely out of place in a depiction of a society in which religion has decayed. Walker notes that Zola's religious thoughts are not coherent but instead rather chaotic. Moreover, the narrator praises social changes while remaining conservative in his belief in bourgeois values; he also writes in support of sexual equality while Luc triumphs as the patriarch in *La Crêcherie*. According to David Meakin, this state of opposition is not appropriate in such a novel: "Utopia demands uniformity, the fiction of its creation requires stories of the elimination of the Other. Figures of opposition either disappear or fall into line."<sup>60</sup> This fact shows that *Travail* is not only utopian but also prophetic: Zola believes that man would be happier in a society based on love and equality and in which the human's animality has largely disappeared.

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<sup>60</sup> David Meakin, "Zola's Utopian Fall: from Ironic Novel to Totalitarian Romance," *Romance Studies* 26 (1995): 102.



### 7.10. Toward an Eradication of Complexity

The above discussion shows that science and mechanics play major roles in this new conception of work reducing the animal side of the human. Indeed, “La science, [...] sert à Tarde pour analyser et voir fonctionner, comme dans un laboratoire, l’invention et l’imitation comme forces de constitution des habitudes et des coutumes;”<sup>61</sup> the same can be said of Zola and his social reformer Luc Froment. Both Zola and Tarde show that imitation is one of the criteria for human freedom and that human plasticity is natural. Moreover, Henri Mitterand analyzes *Germinal* and *Travail* and perceives numerous analogies between them, such as the mines of *Germinal* corresponding to the metallurgic factories of *Travail*, and differences between them, such as “Si *Germinal* est un évangile d’affrontement, *Travail* est donc un évangile de réconciliation.”<sup>62</sup> He also sees a social progression from the miners’ novel to the utopian *Travail*:

Si, dans *Germinal*, la grève et l’insurrection sont comparées à des catastrophes passagères, mais dont le retour régulier est aussi inévitable que celui des inondations ou des tremblement de terre, *Travail* nous propose un mythe inverse et complémentaire: les progrès continus de la science et de la technique donneront aux réformateurs la double maîtrise des forces naturelles et des forces sociales.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lazzarato 22.

<sup>62</sup> Henri Mitterand, “Un Anti-« Germinal »: L’évangile social de «Travail, »” *Roman et Société: colloque du 6 novembre 1971*, Publications de la société d’histoire littéraire de la France (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973) 79.

<sup>63</sup> Mitterand, *Anti-«Germinal»* 81.

There is thus a clear evolution from *Germinal* to *Travail*, from Lantier's modest social project to Froment's complete social revolution. Both of these characters acquire political subjectivity for their courageous fights against the prominent animal side of the human. Yet Lantier's political involvement leads to a work of death while Froment's contribution helps create the humanized and pacified society of *Travail*. Nevertheless, Zola's reification of women reveals the limits of his project depicting the becoming human of the human animal. Humans can only mass-produce human animals into human Immortals on the basis of the prejudiced category of what it is to be human, here male versus female. Finally, in one of his last works, Zola introduces his readers to a simultaneously totalitarian and conservative society, in which differences, except for the male-female one, are eradicated and in which the human-animal border is no longer questioned. In doing so, Zola removes the incredible complexity pertaining to his former characters, such as Nana and Renée. This is probably one of the reasons why *Travail* has never been as widely read as *Nana* or *La curée*.

## 8. Conclusion

This dissertation has underscored the importance of the human-animal discourse in a selection of Zola's novels, and in particular in his female characters. The oppositions inherent in the human animal imply an oxymoronic quality of such beings. Thus, Madeleine, Désirée, Renée and Nana fit the category of "unnatural animal," since they are all humans in conflict with their animal sides and since they are animals who do not live according to natural laws. More specifically, Madeleine is a sinful animal after being physiologically marked by her first lover. As to Désirée, she has a human body but she lives a quasi-animal life. Her human and animal sides do not lead to an unresolved status, as it is the case for Renée and Nana, whose blurred human-animal borders render them enigmatic creatures. Both Renée and Nana are portrayed as unnatural animals in the sense that they do not function according to natural law such as the periodicity of sexual desire. Not only is Zola's description of female characters complex, but his stance toward feminism and women is as well. He seems to be in favor of "women's liberation" as long as it has what he would view as positive repercussions on society as a whole.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal and Badiou's ethics of truth and of evil are the main critical references I use in the above discussion. It is clear that Deleuze and Guattari's and Badiou's philosophical agendas are different and as such not reconcilable. Badiou as a political philosopher becomes useful to talk about Zola's concretization of political subjectivity while Deleuze and Guattari's project, which has been accused of not being political enough, accounts for the complexity of the human-animal status of Zola's female characters. Thus both Badiou's and Deleuze and Guattari's discourses are relevant to my discussion of Zola's human-animal border; both enlighten a different aspect of Zola's complex approach to the human animal. For instance, Badiou's ethic-of politics accounts for Luc Froment's major role in

the creation of the *Cité heureuse*: in the humanized society of *Travail*, the human-animal nature of man is clearly marked. Badiou's ethics of truth accounts for political involvement of the transparent character that is Luc Froment. In his philosophical system, Badiou clearly demarcates the human from the animal and can thus really account for Zola's identical project in *Travail*. Moreover, my discussion of *La faute de l'abbé Mouret* and of the Dreyfus affair underlines Zola's participation in an ethics of both evil and truth, in feelings of love and of pity, two elements of a consistent ethical theory as described by Badiou. Yet Zola differentiates himself from Badiou in expressing love for animals, which are non-human objects of love. In any case, unlike Désirée who cannot be considered a political subject because of her mentally challenged status, Zola reaffirms his political subjectivity in the Dreyfus affair. As to Nana, she plays a social role in her project of avenging the weaker sex and the lower class of society, but her project does not go beyond anarchy. She would thus not acquire political subjectivity in Badiou's terms.

On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal is useful to depict the fantastically complex nature of multi-faceted personalities like Nana and Renée. In these enigmatic women, the limit between their male and female sides and their human and animal sides is constantly questioned. Thus the notion of becoming-animal, which occurs in the schizoanalytic world described by Deleuze and Guattari, puts into question the limits between the male/female and the human/animal. It also has a liberating effect upon these problematic characters and upon the naturalist author. Indeed, Désirée is an excellent example of becoming-animal: her proximity with animals liberates her mental status and allows her to live a happy life. Zola's creation of Désirée, his frequent use of animal imagery and the crucial role played by animals in his own life, make the naturalist author himself become-animal.

Zola's conception of the human as animal is at the basis of his naturalist project and of his scientific approach of life. It is pertinent in all his novels but with a decrease of importance in his last works, his utopian series, *Les quatre évangiles*. It is in *Travail* that Zola presents remedies to the unnatural animal, thus evolving towards equality and political subjectivity. Yet woman does not attain the same status as man: she is only valorized in a patriarchal society. Badiou seems to be more relevant in discussing Zola's partly totalitarian project depicted in *Travail*. For instance, Badiou seems to rationalize and disembodify the notion of love; Zola is most attuned to this aspect in the society of *Travail*, in which desire disappears under a highly codified notion of love and family. In contrast, in his previous novels, Zola offers a different approach to love, which is mainly based on physical relations. Zola links such relations to the human-animal border, which is often blurred as a consequence of the complexity of his female characters and of the unsettled nature of morality in those texts. It is also in his first novels and his Rougon-Macquart series that Zola presents characters whose intricate human-animal status compares to a becoming-animal. In *Travail*, the notion of desire and the animal side of the human disintegrate; they thus play a lesser role than in Zola's previous novels. *Travail* is thus hardly a naturalistic work at all, which might partially explain why it was never a successful or widely read work.

Finally, in a speech given at the annual meeting of the *Société protectrice des animaux* in 1896, Zola, "en simple ami des bêtes,"<sup>1</sup> states that man could not live without animals because life would be silent and sad and because man would be lonely and fearful. Animals are part of human intimacy: if domesticated animals like dogs and cats no longer surrounded man, the latter

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Zola, "Discours à la séance annuelle de la société protectrice des animaux," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol.13 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-70) 841.

would regret this emptiness in his life. Indeed, “Essayez donc de ne vivre qu’entre hommes, maintenant que vous avez admis les bêtes au foyer, et vous verrez tout de suite que vous coupez dans votre vie en pleine chair, que ce sont là des parents que vous retranchez.”<sup>2</sup> Thus animals are not only indispensable to man but explicitly viewed as beings related to humans. At the end of his speech, Zola passionately exhorts his listeners to love animals:

Aimons-les, parce qu’elles sont l’ébauche, le tâtonnement, l’essai d’où nous sommes sortis, avec notre perfection relative; aimons-les, parce que s’il y a autre chose en nous, elles n’ont en elles rien qui ne soit nôtre; aimons-les, parce que, comme nous, elles naissent, souffrent et meurent; aimons-les, parce qu’elles sont nos soeurs cadettes, infirmes et inachevées, sans langage pour dire leurs maux, sans raisonnement pour utiliser leurs dons; aimons-les, parce que nous sommes les plus intelligents, ce qui nous a rendus les plus forts; aimons-les, au nom de la fraternité et de la justice, pour honorer en elles la création, pour respecter l’oeuvre de vie et faire triompher notre sang, le sang rouge qui est le même dans leurs veines et dans les nôtres.<sup>3</sup>

In these encouragements, Zola underlines not only differences but also similarities between humans and animals. For example, animals as deprived of language and reason are thus imperfect. Yet the resemblances between human and non-human beings pertain to blood and the cycle of life, more precisely to birth, suffering and death. It is often this cycle which Zola describes in his novels and which concerns both humans and animals. For Badiou, love of life per se is not human enough, it does not create subjectivity. But these are not the subjects Zola

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<sup>2</sup> Zola 842.

<sup>3</sup> Zola 842.

portrays in his novels, especially not the female ones. Ultimately, this dissertation raises the question of whether there is a politics that would correspond to the becoming-animal of Zola's subjectivities. While this study does not give a complete solution to this difficult problem, it is clear that disembodied politics is not the solution in Zola's female characters.

In conclusion, Zola offers variations in his description of the human-animal borders in his characters, thus not only adding richness to his masterpieces but also showing a plurality of possibilities to the limit dividing humans from animals. If asked to adopt Derrida's neologism *animot* as the divisionary line between the human and the animal, Zola might respond that the issue is more than nominal in his imagination.

## APPENDIX

Edouard Manet's *Nana*



*Nana* (1877) by Edouard Manet. Oil on canvas (154 x 115 cm).

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany.

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