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**GENDER AND JUSTICE IN NATURALIST NARRATIVES:**

***ESPACES, MOMENTS, VIOLENCES***

A Dissertation in

French

by

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## ABSTRACT

Critics have previously examined the inverse correlation between incidences of violent crime and their representation in nineteenth-century France (Vigarello, Muchembled). The relationship between the portrayal of sexual violence in nineteenth-century French literature and its occurrence in real life has received less attention. Likewise, the link between the representation of sexual violence and critical narrative elements, such as space and time, remains unexplored. Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Octave Mirbeau represent the rape-murder of a young peasant girl in three representative texts, *La Bête humaine* (1890), “La Petite Roque” (1885), and *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* (1900). These texts contain a strikingly similar criminal act (rape-murder), an almost identical victim (young peasant girl), and a suspected perpetrator who is much the same, a middle-aged man who is esteemed in his community, and often highly placed provincial bureaucrat. As for the scene of the crime, each of the three texts relies on a dialectic between an undomesticated landscape (forest) and the victim’s corpse. Beyond their dramatic import, these scenes of brutality are referred to throughout the entire narratives, suggesting a greater structural role than current criticism suggests.

This dissertation examines the functions, both narrative and social, of the representations of sexual violence in these three texts. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach pairing close reading with cultural studies, I examine how these scenes of sexual violence are discussed after their occurrence. I analyze the description of each crime scene as well as how the narrative refers back to the crime, the alleged criminals, and their victims, through court proceedings or amateur investigations on the part of characters. A consideration of the social function of such violence includes an overview of the historical context of sexual crimes and the role of gender. What emerges from the examination of these three texts is a new narrative system that, through the representation of crime, is able to indirectly present a criticism of the French state as corrupt.

Moreover, I consider how these representations relate to the larger goals of each author and how these texts point to a new definition of naturalism based on narrative experimentation. Such a definition allows for new intertextual links in the representation of crime and spatio-temporal constructions, in particular for naturalism the unprecedented narrative ties to Victor Hugo's *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (1829).

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## Introduction

In Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's "La Justice et la Vengeance divine poursuivant le Crime" (1808),<sup>1</sup> the artist personifies Justice and Vengeance, both angels, following Crime. The latter is a raggedly clothed man running away from a male body that is lying naked in a crucified position on the ground, with blood trickling from a stab wound to his chest. Crime's gaze is turned back guiltily toward his victim. Justice's torch illuminates the scene; while Vengeance holds aloft a sword, ready to exact an eye for an eye. This early-nineteenth-century painting mythologizes a central concern for both the arts and the state from the nineteenth century onward: the definition of a criminal act, the emergence of a new figure (the criminal), and the role of the victim. Justice and Vengeance are clearly mythological figures, hovering in the sky, wings unfurled; Crime and his victim are oddly humanized, in stark contrast to an early draft of the painting that featured a greater number of noticeably mythical figures.<sup>2</sup> The central place of the victim in the painting's composition echoes the importance that victims will hold for the nineteenth-century imagination.<sup>3</sup> The victim has always played a significant role in literature and history, and his or her sacrifice serves many functions, including the management of collective guilt and desires, the

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<sup>1</sup> Prud'hon's painting is currently housed at the Musée du Louvre and was recently featured in the 2010 Musée d'Orsay exhibit (and subsequent catalog), "Crime et châtement."

<sup>2</sup> Although this painting was originally executed under Napoleon I for the Palais de Paris court, copies were made throughout the century. In 1884, the deputy Félix Faure commissioned a duplicate of Prud'hon's work for a court in Saint-Romain-de-Colbosc, reaffirming the painting's function in the Third Republic as a piece that depicts an unambiguous resolution to criminal violence. The artist Daumier's caricatures of Prud'hon's painting use satire to undermine the possibility of such a clear outcome. For a complete analysis of this work, see Sylvain Laveissière's work on Prud'hon's painting.

<sup>3</sup> René Girard explores the victim in his classic work, *Le Bouc émissaire* (1982), as does Michel Foucault in his lectures on the abnormal individual—*Les Anormaux: cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*.



demonstration of divine allegories, and the regulation of social violence (Lopez and Filizzola 8). The victim is depicted as a Christ-like male figure, in contrast to naturalist fiction in which the victim, while retaining direct ties to crucifixion, can just as likely be female, in which case the crime is often violence of a sexual nature.<sup>4</sup> The nineteenth century serves as a pivotal moment in the definition of sexual violence, whose meaning has evolved considerably over the centuries. It is in the nineteenth century that much legislation around sexual crimes is put into law. Moreover, the Belle Époque is the period in which sexology and sexual criminology emerge as professionalized paths of study on which courts increasingly rely.

With the increased secularization of society, the depiction of justice in literature shifts from the divine (as in *La Chanson de Roland*) to the secular. In the nineteenth century, a host of writers portray the plight of victims at the mercy of what they represent as a corrupt judicial system, from Hugo and Stendhal to Mirbeau and Zola. Several realist works, including Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), portray crimes from start to finish, from the criminal act (often murder) to judgment of the perpetrator. Naturalist writers, wary of the objectivity of the French court system, but reluctant to avoid judgment all together, must rely on imminent justice, often of a supernatural form, in order to put guilty characters on trail indirectly. In doing so, we shall see that naturalism often deals in supernatural vengeance, though its judgment is not without ambiguity, and the avenging sword of Prudhon's painting does not strike with so unequivocal a decree.

The representation of criminal violence has a long history, full of complexity and changing forms. Curiously, there is an inverse correlation between such representations and statistical rates of personal violence. Historically, whereas acts of brutality have decreased

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<sup>4</sup> Violence "désigne les crimes contre les personnes, dont font partie l'homicide, les coups et blessures, les viols, etc." (Muchembled 19-20).

steadily since the end of the Middle Ages,<sup>5</sup> their depiction has increasingly permeated media and art forms, particularly from the nineteenth century onward, when “[l]a fascination pour le crime s’impose” and homicide becomes “l’argument central pour le roman policier” (Muchembled 408).<sup>6</sup> Cultural critics, for example, note the preponderant place accorded to murder in the popular press, such as *La Gazette des tribunaux* and *Le Petit Parisien*, both often used by writers as inspiration for their fiction.<sup>7</sup> We must account for this discrepancy between statistics and mediated forms of violence (the press, literature, art) in order to explain the function of violence in literature and society. As French historian and sociologist Georges Vigarello asks of the relation between art and life: “Violence racontée plus que violence vécue? Violence représentée plus que violence agie? C’est bien vers cette version que conduisent plusieurs constats: récits et commentaires de la presse à la fin du [dix-neuvième] siècle multiplient les scènes de sang alors qu’un effacement relatif de la violence est confirmé par les chiffres” (209). Much work has been done on the representation of crime, including sexual violence, in the press, particularly the work of Dominique Kalifa. Kalifa draws on literary examples, as does Vigarello. Rather than focus on newspapers and other media, my study concentrates much more closely on the existing literary examples of sexual violence. I go beyond the initial origin of represented crimes, often a “fait divers,” in order to discern the narrative structures surrounding the literary depiction and discussion of sex crimes.

Unlike other forms of personal violence, the occurrence of sexual violence does not decline from the Middle Ages to the present day. Instead, it has become an emerging theme both

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<sup>5</sup> “Du XIIIe au XXIe siècle, la violence physique et la brutalité des rapports humains suivent une trajectoire déclinante dans toute l’Europe de l’Ouest” (Muchembled 7).

<sup>6</sup> “Together with love, murder is perhaps the most frequently deployed novelistic theme” (Bal, “Overwriting as un-writing” 120).

<sup>7</sup> According to Régis Messac, Balzac’s reading of the *Gazette des tribunaux* spawned many of his novels (451).

in literature and in new legislation.<sup>8</sup> Sexual assault has been represented throughout the history of art and literature, from Bernini to Sade.<sup>9</sup> In particular, stories concerning sexual crimes abound in the late nineteenth century, when we witness the birth of the sadistic serial killer as a character type. In short stories and novels, as well as other genres, sexual violence plays a progressively more central role in the turn of narrative events in Belle Époque France, particularly in naturalist narratives. Naturalist authors not only include sexually violent acts in their texts, but also make these criminal actions a repeated referent throughout the given work. Such primary focus suggests that sexual violence serves a more important function than has been previously acknowledged in the study of naturalist fiction.<sup>10</sup>

We need to pay attention to this surge in the portrayal of sexual assault for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that such violence reveals a great deal about underlying ideologies of gender and class. Feminist critic Sarah Projansky emphasizes the structural role of representations of sexual cruelty in film, but her remarks apply equally well to literature, and particularly to the era under study: “The pervasiveness of representations of rape naturalizes rape’s place in our everyday world, not only as real physical events but also as part of our fantasies, fears, desires, and consumptive practices. Representations of rape form a complex of cultural discourses central to the very structure of stories people tell about themselves and others” (3). Projansky suggests, in fact, that the representation of sexual violence carries implications far

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive history of sexual violence and its prosecution in France, see Robert Muchembled (316-67), Vigarello (177-98), and Michelle Perrot (*Histoire de la vie privée* 263-85).

<sup>9</sup> The latter’s *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) shows an early political (and parodical) use of the representation of sexual violence. Sade constitutes the most famous example of the utilization of representations of extreme sexual violence in order to make a larger political point. We find other examples with less obvious political points in medieval texts, as well as more contemporary ones, like Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868-69). For more on the links between Sade’s writing, the law, and masculinity, see Hekma and Ost.

<sup>10</sup> Previous work on sexual violence in French literary naturalism has largely been confined to articles or chapters. See Hannah Thompson’s “Questions of Sexuality and Gender,” David Baguley’s “The ‘scandal’ of Naturalism,” as well as Lawrence Schehr’s work. Unlike French literary naturalism, American literary naturalism has inspired book-length studies on sexual violence, including Irene Gammel’s study on Theodore Dreiser and Frederick Philip Grove.

beyond the portrayal of an actual event. What, then, does it mean when we find a large number of narratives structured around sexual crimes, as we do in naturalist works?

When read against each other, various texts featuring sexual violence bring to light “a number of profoundly disturbing patterns,” including “an obsessive inscription—and an obsessive erasure—of sexual violence against women” (Higgins and Silver 2). What Higgins and Silver are arguing, as Projansky suggests above, is that the greater the number of texts that portray sexual violence, the more this kind of violence begins to seem like a natural event, and thus less shocking; “rape and sexual violence have been so ingrained and so rationalized through their representations as to appear ‘natural’ and inevitable, to women and to men” (Higgins and Silver 2). Female readers (and writers), then, are not immune to the normalizing of rape within cultural artifacts. The greater the number of plots revolving around issues of sexual violence, the more readers will consider this particular form of violence a naturally recurring part of life. Such a phenomenon may seem like a contradiction, and in fact points to the uniqueness and complexity of sexual violence, both in life and in art. Certainly we do not take murder for granted in the same way, and its abrupt decline since pre-modern times attests to society’s ardent and successful attempts to curb certain acts of violence, especially those that detract from the state’s power.<sup>11</sup> Works that depict murder, from Thomas De Quincey’s *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts* (1826) to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866), murder stands out as a dramatic plot device that does not fade into the background no matter how often its occurrence. The fact that sexual violence can be taken for granted in literary works poses a number of problematic consequences, not the least of which is the neglect on the part of critics to study its function (both literary and social). If rape narratives are so pervasive as to become blasé, or at least somewhat invisible, then why would authors include them at all? What does rape *do* in a

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<sup>11</sup> Muchembled gives a convincing argument that the French state systematically found ways to prohibit interpersonal violence and instead reserve violence as a normative state practice, as in war (17-54).

text? Why rape is there in the first place is a much larger question that is beyond the limits of this dissertation. What I can address, through the close-reading of several criminal scenes, is how each author uses the depiction of sexual violence.

Such questions are particularly important when turning to texts influenced by realism. Naturalist works, for example, are usually examined in terms of their claim to portray reality. If these texts are taking rape for granted, then their authors are reinforcing gender norms even while ostensibly promoting social justice and criticizing the French state. Or could something more complex be at work? In this study, I ask what is the function of the representation of sexual violence in naturalist texts. How do naturalists write sexual violence and how is its portrayal related to their larger goals? How does gender relate to the portrayal of sexual violence? Is sexual violence portrayed as criminal? How are crimes defined for these writers in relation to sexuality and gender?

Beyond the above areas of investigation, a study of the representation of sexual violence in literature has much to tell us about the workings of literature itself. Crime is interesting as a social matrix for fiction because it is formally important; it presents to us epistemological questions, such as the impossibility of returning to the scene of a crime. All we are left with are traces, with no reasonable way back to the original event. In each of the texts under study in this dissertation, the sex crime is recalled, either by the perpetrator (Maupassant) or other characters (Mirbeau, Zola). In these stories, the reminiscence of a crime also involves a reimagining of the incident based on each character's perception. Morality aside, crime presents us with formal problems. However, if we view crime as a formal problem, does the victim become nothing more than a device, an apparatus, thus making the reader complicit?

To answer these questions and in an effort to denaturalize literary conventions of violence that have become widespread in the arts and the media, I examine the representation of violence in selected short stories and novels from three key figures associated with naturalism—

Emile Zola (1840-1902), Guy de Maupassant (1850-93), and Octave Mirbeau (1848-1917). I am defining naturalism—in contrast to Symbolism, Decadence, and “l’écriture artiste”—as the concern during this period with the depiction of social realities and the engagement of intellectuals in shedding light on these realities, not to mention the influence of science on these writers. All three authors worked actively to promote social change, Zola and Mirbeau most notably in their participation in the Dreyfus Affair (a common structural thread in Mirbeau’s narratives), which constitutes the most blatant form of corruption at the highest state levels. Likewise, each of these writers was concerned with technological progress and its effect on society. More importantly, each of these texts concerns itself with literary experimentation (what I consider the defining characteristic of naturalism) of a specific and similar nature. The spatio-temporal continuum in these works emerges as an apparatus that is being invented, with different sites of intensification. A narrative system is created with crime as the limit test. A formal development takes place in these naturalist texts that exposes the hidden slight of hand of naturalist writers. These texts serve as core examples, representative because they are representative of this system. Before addressing the nature of this apparatus, I will briefly discuss other ways in which Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau were associated with naturalism, particularly since there is some disagreement as to where Mirbeau stands as a writer, either as a Decadent author or a naturalist.<sup>12</sup>

While Maupassant did not claim to be a naturalist, both he and Mirbeau were closely linked to the group that included Zola and other prominent naturalists (Paul Alexis, Henri Céard, etc.). It is not so much whether Mirbeau or Maupassant is a naturalist or not, *per se*. Labels mean very little and take us away from the texts themselves. Rather, I associate Mirbeau with Maupassant and Zola in what I am calling “naturalist narratives” because of Mirbeau’s affinity to

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<sup>12</sup> See Robert Ziegler’s “Naturalism as Paranoia in Octave Mirbeau” for another example of the view of Mirbeau as a possible naturalist.

what I consider the crux of Zola's naturalism: the redressing of social wrongs through literature, the idea that literature matters and can make a difference. I envision naturalism as an attempt to marry theory and practice, to write about subjects no one has tackled (the world from a female servant's position)—or at least not in the same way. I have chosen narratives that feature sexual violence centrally as a way to display the most severe injustices.

Is the narratological use of sexual violence at odds with the naturalist political agenda, namely, to promote social justice? Zola is certainly not a feminist, though the *Rougon-Macquart* points to the severe gender inequalities of late-nineteenth-century France, particularly for women of the lower classes. I will show that Zola, as well as Maupassant and Mirbeau, explicitly uses the representation of sexual violence in order to make a larger point about the political corruption of government. The threat of sexual violence to women also alludes to the tensions surrounding women's growing independence. Elaine Showalter views the Belle Époque as a time of redefinition of gender for both men and women that results in a growing and persistent resistance to female independence, exemplified in such outlets as the springing up of men's clubs (8). The sexual threats made to women in the literary representation of sexual violence serve as another such site of resistance to female independence.

The representation of sexual violence toward women bring up larger questions about the tensions surrounding changing gender roles in the *Belle Époque*. The *Belle Époque* (1871-1914) was a time of rapid technological changes (greater access to public transportation, faster communication through the telegraph and press) and social developments (women's increasing equality). Naturalist writers believe that fiction can effectuate social change through the display of contemporary inequalities. So, what do we make of the central place sexual violence holds in these texts? While emphasizing the promotion of social justice and criticizing the state, each of our three writers employs literary representations of sexual violence to portray symbolically the corrupt and degenerative nature of the judicial institutions of the Second Empire and Third

Republic. The figure of the young girl is sacrificed in order to illustrate the corruptions of the State system at every level. Distrustful of the possibility of achieving justice for these girls' deaths through the state judiciary system, Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau rely on imminent justice. Ultimately, however, these female martyrs recover some agency by haunting other characters, including their murderers.

The relationship between social justice and the spatio-temporal poetics of narrative remains unexamined by critical literature, as Henri Mitterand has frequently noted for the case of Zola. This remark applies equally for Maupassant and Mirbeau. Space and time are among the most basic and important elements in literary texts and their analysis. There is a growing interest in reevaluating the representation of space and time in literature as a result of the contributions of diverse fields, from geography to cultural studies. For this dissertation, the dialectic between crime scenes and landscape is essential to understanding the texts. Literary critic Mieke Bal notes that the “semantic content of spatial aspects can be constructed in the same way as the semantic content of a character” (*Narratology* 135). Extending her claim to temporality, I seek to fill a lacuna in the study of seminal nineteenth-century texts in order to demonstrate the nature of spatio-temporal ideologies that informed and limited movement and imagination in the late nineteenth century.

In nineteenth-century texts around the world, we find a similar concern for the threats to women across genres. In Italy, Giovanni Verga suggests in his collection of short stories, *Vita dei campi* (1880), the links between the threat of sexual violence to women and spatio-temporal structures. In “La Luppa,” the threat of a woman walking alone at night is summed up in the following idiom: “In quell'ora fra vespero e nona, in cui non ne va in volta femmina buona [In the hours between dusk and dawn, good women do not go out].”<sup>13</sup> In Germany, Theodor Fontane's *Effie Briest* (1894) points to the constructed nature of these threats when Effie's husband uses her

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<sup>13</sup> For the relation between Italian “verismo” and French naturalism, see Pagano.



fear of ghosts to keep her at home. In England, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) uses the theme of sexual assault to highlight Tess's social vulnerability as a lower-class young woman. The French "agrégation" for 2006-2007 featured both Hardy's and Fontane's novels in the comparative literature exam (entitled "Destinées féminines dans le contexte du naturalisme européen"), as well as Zola's *Nana* (1880). While a comparative analysis of different national literatures is beyond the limits of this dissertation, placing gender at the center of such a critical French national exam shows not only how far the study of gender has come in France in recent date (Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* only having been translated in 2006), but also that Naturalism gives gender a special place in its panoply of themes.

My concern, however, lies with the treatment of sexual violence in naturalist narratives. Louise, <sup>14</sup> Louise, <sup>15</sup> and Claire<sup>16</sup> are each young female victims subjected to extreme sexually violent deaths. Each of these texts is concerned with predispositions of violence in male characters, something much studied in criminological theory of the nineteenth century, when explanations for criminal behavior were grounded in degeneration theory. The texts that represent these women also portray increasing instances of rape-murder over time, particularly of children. In all three, we find a specific and violent type of crime—the rape-murder of a young country girl—as well as similar circumstances. I am interested in how each writer portrays both the criminals and the victims involved. How is the criminality of potential suspects portrayed, given the advent of criminological theory in the nineteenth century? How does each author, as well as the prevailing wisdom of his time, define "crime," "criminal," and "victim" in each narrative? Furthermore, how are state institutions represented with respect to the crimes and their punishment? Do authors make any attempt to define "rape" as criminal? In order to answer these

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<sup>14</sup> *La Bête humaine* (1890).

<sup>15</sup> "La Petite Roque" (1885).

<sup>16</sup> *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900).

questions, I examine texts that focus on crime and that include sexual violence in order to better understand the function of sexual violence in naturalist fiction.

Narratological concerns, therefore, are at the heart of my study. How is sexual violence incorporated into naturalist narratives—as description or action? How does the representation of sexual violence bring up larger questions about the relationship between description and action in literature? Does the function of sexual violence in naturalist narratives follow what we have already learned about naturalist poetics, or does it suggest something new? Because the depiction of crime in literature is heavily dependent on description, narratological theory related to time and space will be of prime concern; both of these are key aspects to description.<sup>17</sup> When and where violence occurs in each of these narratives is essential to its textual function. The links between social justice and the spatio-temporal poetics of naturalist narratives remain unexamined by critical literature, as Henri Mitterand has frequently noted for Zola.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, there is a growing interest in re-evaluating the representation of space and time in literature as a result of the contributions of diverse fields, from geography to cultural studies. Even if research abounds in the cultural considerations of space and time, few scholars have explored how narratology enriches our understanding of the discursive representations of violence. To this end, I examine the relationship between discourses of gendered violence<sup>19</sup> as represented in spatio-temporal

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<sup>17</sup> I use concepts from formalism that are still pertinent for narratological analysis, such as *fabula* (plot) and *suzhet* (story). However, in contrast to many critics, I do not restrict spatio-temporal elements to one or the other of these two. In fact, the narratological impetus for this study is meant in part to show how elements of “description” can play prominent roles in both the story and plot.

<sup>18</sup> “Much work remains to be done to chart and account for what is distinctive about Zola’s handling of spatial setting, as compared to that of other nineteenth-century novelists” (Mitterand, *Écrits sur le roman* 14).

<sup>19</sup> One of the main reasons that we can consider sexual violence to be gendered in these works is because while both men and women are victims of assault and murder, literary fiction of the late nineteenth century feminizes victimhood. In differentiating between male and female heroes, Margaret Cohen finds that heroines are portrayed as less shrewd: “Heroines, in contrast [to the realist hero], remain suffering, as their sexuality, their money, and their social position, become the tools the hero manipulates, more or less skillfully, in his rise” (59). Critics are not immune to reproducing language that feminizes victimhood: “Les transgressions violentes visent d’abord les êtres les plus faibles, enfants et servantes, orphelines et mendiantes, bergères, glaneuses, travailleuses isolées” (Vigarello 291). Note how Vigarello uses the

constructions in literary texts. In this, I adhere to a respect for the text echoed by many of the critics central to my analysis.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout this study, I will be using the term “spatio-temporal construction,” hereafter abbreviated as ST (spatio-temporal) or STC (spatio-temporal construction). The words “spatio-temporal” will perhaps be repeated more than is liked, but rather than privilege one or the other, I prefer to consistently pair them so as not to disassociate the two terms, as so often happens. I use this expression to illustrate part of the new development we are seeing in these representative texts, with scenes in which space and time are so semantically charged as to become veritable characters, and where characters’ behaviors depend exclusively on ST caveats.<sup>21</sup> That naturalist texts pay particular attention to questions of time and space is undisputed. In listing the variety of spaces in naturalist works in relation to human experience, Mitterrand makes a connection between behavior and STCs when he describes social space as one that “répartit les foules, organise et règle leur travail et leurs conduites” (*Zola: l’histoire et la fiction* 81). Zola himself perhaps said it best when he described the links between time, space, and literature: “Notre héros [...] est le sujet physiologique de notre science actuelle, un être qui est composé d’organes et qui trempe dans un milieu dont il est pénétré à chaque heure” (“Stendhal,” *Les Romanciers naturalistes* 292). Through my presentation of the different STCs in naturalist fiction, however, I will show how the particular world making taking place in these three texts represents the

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feminine forms of different jobs in relation to victimhood. One of his few linguistic slips (victims were, in reality, both “berger” and “bergères”), this example shows how deeply gendered tropes of violence permeate our subconscious, that a researcher more than aware of the constructed nature of assault would replicate in his own style the very binary he takes to task.

<sup>20</sup> “L’écueil de n’importe quelle méthode d’analyse, c’est d’établir un filtre qui fausse ou déforme l’équilibre du texte analysé; quoi que fasse le critique, il effectue inévitablement une sélection d’unités qu’il adopte pour les besoins de son travail. Pour éviter de telles difficultés, il est important, me semble-t-il, de respecter l’organisation interne du texte, et de prendre en considération les rapports entre l’espace et les autres éléments constitutifs” (Issacharoff 17-18).

<sup>21</sup> Playing on French critic Hippolyte Taine’s three concepts for analyzing literature (*race*, *moment*, and *milieu*), my dissertation title not only recalls the way naturalist writers tried to align science and literature; it also serves as a reminder of the inherent multiplicity of spatio-temporal constructions by using the plural. This multiplicity has been too often neglected in the study of space and time in literature.

development of a new spatio-temporal apparatus. Taking Mitterand's view on space a step farther, I include gender.<sup>22</sup>

During the Belle Époque, many features of life we consider contemporary—a national media that could be easily mobilized, better availability of public transportation—became more commonplace. Literature, particularly naturalist fiction, began depicting the changing facets of everyday life and its increasing mechanization, according prime importance to aspects of time and space. Cultural Geographer David Harvey views the literary concern with temporality and spatiality in the nineteenth century as symptomatic of cultural anxieties:

Neither literature nor art could avoid the question of internationalism, synchrony, insecure temporality, and the tension within the dominant measure of value between the financial system and its monetary or commodity base. [...] [The works of Manet, Flaubert, and Baudelaire] were signals of a radical break of cultural sentiment that reflected a profound questioning of the meaning of space and place, of present, past and future, in a world of insecurity and rapidly expanding spatial horizons. [...] The expansion of the railway network, accompanied by the advent of the telegraph, the growth of steam shipping, and the building of the Suez Canal, the beginnings of radio communication and bicycle and automobile travel at the end of the century, all changed the sense of time and space in radical ways. (263-64)

Although I agree with Harvey, I would extend his claim to take into account the influence of literary genres such as crime fiction and travel literature on the poetics of nineteenth-century

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<sup>22</sup> “Ajoutons que cela devrait se faire de manière comparative, de manière à poser dans leurs singularité, dans leurs éventuelles analogies, mais aussi dans leurs différences, un espace Zola, un espace Flaubert—ce ne sont évidemment pas les mêmes, ni dans les contenus, ni dans l’arrangement de signes—, un espace Proust, un espace Céline” (*Zola: l’histoire et la fiction* 201).

novelists, dramatists, and short-story writers.<sup>23</sup> In the texts that I analyze, attention both to clock time and to the effects of punctuality on society is tied directly to gendered discourses of violence. We see in the *fin-de-siècle* the development of “punctuality,” though many critics insist on this change as progressive, exemplified by the double-dial watch that “kept both local and railway time to accommodate the growing influence of the latter” (Murphy 13). Railway times were slowly coordinated with local times until the 1850s in Europe, and by the 1880s had reached a degree of uniformity that enabled *La Bête humaine*’s “chronocentric” character to be viewed as a case of verisimilitude: “[r]ailway timetables indirectly but dramatically altered individual lives by suddenly subjecting once-unregulated events to the clock” (13). Writers exploited the more dangerous aspects of the opportunities afforded to a population governed by punctuality, such as creating the perfect murder and false alibis that relied on manipulating time schedules (*La Bête humaine*). Drawing on a multitude of disciplines, including cultural studies, history, and feminist theory, I concentrate on narratological aspects of this change.

I will examine narrative choices that have gender implications, including the selection of victims (preponderantly female) and the nature of violence done to them (increasingly of a sexual nature in naturalist texts). The artificial aspect of these choices becomes evident when they are examined historically. Unlike what we see in naturalist stories, previous literary eras did not necessarily demonstrate a misogynistic selection of victims.<sup>24</sup> I highlight the notion of “gender” in order to discuss both feminized and masculinized reifications, such as tropes of gendered behavior in an STC (e.g., a woman walking alone at night who is killed). By teasing out the particulars of the narrative structures of aggression, I investigate how naturalist fiction

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<sup>23</sup> Many of these texts can be seen as early examples of crime fiction, but I hesitate to use this term due to the limitations it imposes, since I refer to novels and short stories that are not at all associated with the genre of “crime fiction” *per se*.

<sup>24</sup> As Cohen explains for the early-nineteenth-century sentimental novel, for example, “a protagonist’s gender makes little difference to his or her fate. Heroes and heroines alike suffer the tensions caused by their dual allegiances to collective welfare and individual freedom. For both, this conflict is often emplotted as a tyrannical parent or relative who rules with crushing authority over the child’s choice of beloved, whether the parent is dead or alive” (57).

(ironically) “naturalizes” gendered discourses of violence, that is to say making social constructions seem natural, deforming actual facts and statistics in order to make an ideological point. However, I will show that far from being able to clearly label these texts as “misogynistic,” we can see examples of victims who reclaim agency through supernatural means. By analyzing some of the many texts where instances of sexual violence occur, therefore, we can better ascertain the function of such violence for naturalist writers.

In Chapter One, I investigate how literary theory can help us study STCs of sexual violence in the novel and short story. Literary critic Mieke Bal notes that the “semantic content of spatial aspects can be constructed in the same way as the semantic content of a character” (*Narratology* 135). Extending her claim to temporality, I seek to fill a lacuna in the study of seminal late-nineteenth-century texts in order to demonstrate the nature of the ideologies that informed and limited movement and imagination. I analyze space and time for implications of gender, studying STCs by conveying the analytical model at the crux of each of these texts. This model shows how the writers separate out particular instances of action (cases of sexual violence), to be used, recalled, and retold, relying on both spatial and temporal elements. I embark on an extended discussion of “gendered time,” which has received less critical attention than “gendered space.” In so doing, I work to connect time and space. Moreover, I examine interdisciplinary theories that can throw light on the topics at hand. For example, what does cultural studies tell us about how societal changes may have influenced the representation of space and time in late-nineteenth-century France?

Victor Hugo stands out as a predecessor consistently concerned with society’s definition of the criminal, the victim, and crime. Several of Hugo’s most well-known texts take up the theme of criminal behavior and prosecution, from some of his earliest works—*Han d’Islande*

(1823), *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), and *Claude Gueux* (1834)—to *Les Misérables* (1862).<sup>25</sup> In Chapter Two, I investigate how these Hugolian texts, in particular *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné*, function as early models for writing crime and violence. In *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (1829) and *Claude Gueux*,<sup>26</sup> Hugo experiments with the literary portrayal of prison experiences. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, he represents multiple forms of (often sexual) violence against Esmeralda, from the eroticization of her state-sanctioned torture to Frollo's obsessed sexual pursuit of her that culminates in her death. Taken together, these texts offer a pathway toward the continued narrative experimentation that will define naturalist fiction. I cannot use the STC analysis model from naturalist works on any of these texts, as there is not a single instance of violence that is reiterated. This points to the new aspects of narrative development in these works by Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau. The violent crime that resulted in the incarceration of the narrator in *Le Dernier Jour* is only hinted at vaguely, for instance;<sup>27</sup> *Claude Gueux* minimizes the violence of the eponymous real-life figure; and finally, Frollo's stalking of Esmeralda and subsequent efforts to persecute and kill her are a main component of the story. My model for analyzing STCs requires that events be retold in some manner, either in the description or the narration. In contrast, Zola, Mirbeau, and Maupassant will each place a distinct violent sex crime at the heart of their narratives and continually refer back to it, one of the most important aspects of this naturalist apparatus. Notwithstanding this dispersal of spatio-temporal elements among

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<sup>25</sup> According to Myriam Roman, many of Hugo's dramatic works also examine the shortcomings of political power in terms of random judgment, such as *Marion Delorme* (1829): "Les drames romantiques de Hugo interrogent l'arbitraire et les défaillances du pouvoir royal, puissance qui détient sur ses sujets un droit de vie et de mort" (45).

<sup>26</sup> Sobanet qualifies as *Claude Gueux* "a precursor to the transformation of reality into fiction found in the prison novels studied here" (14). I would add that Hugo's transformation involves some notable changes to historical fact, including making Claude Gueux significantly older than his close friend and fellow inmate Albin, thereby eliminating making their relationship paternalistic rather than sexual, as it was. As Sobanet intimates in discussing prison novels of the twentieth-century, Hugo is able to make these changes because "the fact that the texts are works of fiction allows writers to manipulate their source material without a breach of contract between text and reader" (15).

<sup>27</sup> Lucien Dällenbach explains that Hugo was criticized by his editor as well as critics for not including a chapter explaining the narrator's crime, "les reproches portaient essentiellement sur cette non-individualisation du crime et du criminel" (77).

these three Hugolian texts, I argue that their study is fundamental to later narrative experimentation by naturalist writers.

*Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* examines incarceration as a spatio-temporal experience, mocking Xavier de Maistre's mostly forgotten work, *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794). De Maistre, a far right defender of the death penalty, like his more famous brother (Joseph de Maistre), has been largely forgotten, an error, considering how Hugo's parody of de Maistre's travel narrative (a parody in itself) manages to subtly criticize de Maistre's political views through literary form. Drawing on Gérard Genette and Michel Foucault, I look at how Hugo's progressively intercalated narration (blending narration and action towards the end of the novel) is complemented by the positioning of time and space as state ideologies posited by early nineteenth century processes of incarceration and execution.<sup>28</sup> The strict daily routines of the prison are part and parcel of the state's tight control over inmates. While widely recognized as a fundamental text on capital punishment, *Le Dernier Jour* has received far less attention in terms of its experimentation with narrative form. Hugo provides an as yet unappreciated model for later nineteenth-century realist and naturalist writers, as well as techniques commonly associated with Modernism. When considered alongside other texts from Hugo's œuvre, *Le Dernier Jour* portrays narrative structures and themes that will resonate throughout the selected works of Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau: a precise attention to spatial and temporal elements and ideologies, the repeated inscription of sexual violence against women (combined with the erasure of sexual violence against men), the central role of young girls as figures of the sublime (innocence) and

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<sup>28</sup> Hugo's novel displays all four of the types of narration identified by Genette, but most often uses intercalated (*Figures III* 229-30). Besides distinguishing between them, Genette also separates time in relation to narration. For Genette, time must be privileged over (and separated from) space. While he considers it possible not to situate place in a literary text, not situating the temporality of the text is, for him, impossible. In this way, Genette considers temporal determinations to be more important than spatial aspect—the predominant view among critics. I, however, do not place more importance on time or space, seeing both as mutually constitutive.



grotesque (slang as a degenerative form of language), and an attempt to criticize the state through a close examination of criminal institutions.

In his critical article, “Victor Hugo,” Zola gives a thorough chronology of the early years of Hugo’s career. Curiously, though Zola goes into great detail about the works he considers the most important in the period from 1820 to 1830, he neglects any mention of *Le Dernier Jour*. He lists every other work written by Hugo during this time, but skips the year 1829. He even marks 1828 as the year when Hugo revealed himself as a “novateur,” and discusses how this novelty is evident in Hugo’s 1830 *Hernani* (*Œuvres complètes* 39-41). Given Zola’s admiration for Hugo, as well as the adulation from those around him for *Le Dernier Jour*,<sup>29</sup> such a critical ellipse deserves our attention. And while *Le Dernier Jour* was initially published anonymously, there was no mystery as of the early 1830s about its authorship (Hugo admitting his involvement in later editions). In some ways, this absence serves to bolster Zola’s own opinion that Hugo is a great lyrical poet, but not a novelist.<sup>30</sup>

What is even more curious is how Hugo’s methods for writing *Le Dernier Jour* adumbrate Zola’s. As Andrew Sobanet explains, though “never an inmate himself, Hugo visited prisons, interviewed prisoners, and wrote about their living conditions” (13). In creating what would become the tenets of investigative journalism, Zola likewise insisted on going “sur le terrain” to better inform himself as a writer on his subject matter, whether it be the daily lives of miners or department store employees. Jean Massin notes that Hugo correspondingly did a great deal of research in writing *Le Dernier Jour*: “Pour écrire son ouvrage, Hugo s’était sérieusement documenté: il était allé à Bicêtre en octobre 1827 puis en octobre 1828 et avait assisté au

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<sup>29</sup> Flaubert, for example, showed his respect for *Le Dernier Jour* in his correspondence, praising Hugo’s text for the non-intrusive narrator (Romain 140).

<sup>30</sup> “J’ai nommé Victor Hugo, et je veux l’écarter tout de suite, car je ne vois pas en lui un romancier. Il a mis dans le roman ses procédés de poète, la création énorme de son tempérament lyrique. Il demanderait une étude à part” (“George Sand,” *Écrits sur le roman* 168).

ferrement des forçats et à leur départ” (671). The effect of seeing the convicts is clearly seen in the writing of a similar scene in both *Le Dernier Jour* and *Les Misérables*.

Though some may consider violent crime to be fundamental to Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart*, only three novels explicitly treat this subject.<sup>31</sup> *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), *La Bête humaine*, and *La Terre* (1887) are all concerned directly with intense violence and sexuality, including murder and lust, murder and rape, and rape-murders. Chapter Three explores one of these prominent Zolian texts, *La Bête humaine*, where the figure of the *flâneur* takes on the most harrowing of forms—literature’s first modern serial killer. While authors like Honoré de Balzac map out heterosexist masculine behavior in detail, as in *Ferragus* (1833), it is only later in the century that the more sinister aspects of stalking are exploited by writers.<sup>32</sup> *La Bête humaine* is Zola’s attempt to depict the inner and outer world of the “meurtrier,” belonging to a marginalized category outside of the four worlds peopling the *Rougon-Macquart*.<sup>33</sup> Through the characters of Lantier and Grandmorin, Zola invests literature with some of its first modern sexual predators.

Unlike Hugo, Zola devotes as much room to criminal acts in his texts as to the consequences of the crime, allowing him to display his fascination with criminological theory. Criminology as a science was increasingly respected and of growing import in the late nineteenth century. By the time of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, criminology would earn its own gallery section for criminal anthropology. Mitterand notes that *La Bête humaine* “apparaîtra au

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<sup>31</sup> Zola maintained that he was surprised by the way his texts shocked the public for their frank display of desire and its consequences, namely reproduction. For Zola, the banality of crime (especially murder) in literature was far more disturbing. “Le meurtre est donc plus propre et moins honteux que l’acte de la génération ? Il est donc plus convenable de tuer un être que d’en faire un? Absolument, je ne comprends pas” (*Écrits sur le roman* 242).

<sup>32</sup> Heterosexuality takes heterosexuality as a given, precluding other sexualities. Such bias puts heterosexism in line with other “-isms” (racism, sexism) and has far reaching consequences in life and literature alike. Heterosexism can be paired with similar terms, like “compulsory heterosexuality” (coined by the poet Adrienne Rich and commented on extensively by feminist theorist Gayle Rubin), and “heterosexual matrix” (Judith Butler). The nineteenth century philosopher Kierkegaard contributed to the development of the modern heterosexist imagination, most notably in *Ou bien...ou bien* (see Berry).

<sup>33</sup> In addition to creating four worlds (occupied by the people, the workers, the businessmen, and the aristocracy), Zola creates a “monde à part” with the following types of characters: “meurtrier, lorette, militaire, ouvrier” (Mitterand, *OC* 1709).

bon moment pour illustrer les discussions contemporaines sur la signification du crime” (Mitterand, *OC* 1715). The link between criminal behavior and ideas of degeneration so prevalent in *fin-de-siècle* France comes to the fore in *La Bête humaine*. In Chapter Three, I will show how work done in history (Eliza Earle Ferguson) and film (Tanya Horeck) also has implications for Zola’s treatment of sexual violence. While David Baguley notes that *Nana* has received the most consideration in this regard, more recent attention has been given to masculinity studies and to criticism of *La Bête humaine* (Becker, Bell, Counter, Larry Duffy).<sup>34</sup> My analysis focuses on the exaggeration of masculinity in the latter novel in the figure of the male serial killer.

I investigate to what degree men’s violence against women is accepted as a normal part of daily life. In *La Bête humaine*, Zola theorizes interpersonal violence, particularly domestic abuse, both physical and sexual. *La Bête humaine* depicts sexual crime more than any other. Vigarello notes that this is a common choice among contemporary novelists: “Il faut souligner plus largement combien la brutalité physique s’impose aussi dans les récits du crime à la fin du siècle alors que le vol l’a longtemps emporté [...] [...] Le viol est du coup loin d’être le premier dans la hiérarchie imaginaire du crime alors que se polarisent toujours davantage les craintes sur la violence de sang” (211). In Zola’s portrait of a homicidal killer, what shocks readers is not so much Jacques’s actions as the relative acceptance of these actions by those around him. His family—his aunt Phasie, and his cousin Flore—, for example, knows Jacques’s predisposition for sexual violence against women, well before he murders Séverine at the novel’s end. In the second chapter, when we first meet Flore, she affirms (to Jacques) that “tu abominais les femmes” (95). While the main investigation follows the murder of Grandmorin, which is a result of violent jealousy, several other murders and crimes permeate the text, most notably the vicious rape-murder of a young peasant girl, Louissette, near Croix-Maufras. In this chapter I explore other

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<sup>34</sup> For more on masculinity studies, see David Adams and Rachel Savran, David D. Gilmore, Todd W. Reeser, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. For work specific to France, see Pierre Bourdieu’s text, *La domination masculine* (2002).

female characters that are abused, especially Louissette, a relative of Jacques who is killed by Grandmorin. This past act will repeatedly be recalled in the story and form a narrative matrix around which the text unfolds. Several characters refer to the episode in a way that haunts the reader. Too often, this repetition/retelling in Zola's novel has been overlooked, even though it is one its main organizational elements. Like Grandmorin's murder, Louissette's death will be pinned on the wrong suspect, Cobuche, who corresponds visually to a born criminal.

In his 1994 overview of the literature on Maupassant, Robert Lethbridge includes violence as a promising new lens for understanding Maupassant's fiction (188). In this vein, I take up Maupassant's short stories featuring sexual violence in Chapter Four, in particular "La Petite Roque." Like Zola, Maupassant portrays the violent rape-murder of a young girl, for whom the story (and initial collection of short stories) takes its name. I focus on this example in order to show the increasingly explicit nature of sexual violence in naturalist texts and to determine if its function varies between texts. I continue to question the role of sexual violence in relation to the text's implicit criticism of the state, as I did in the previous chapter on Zola.<sup>35</sup> Like Zola and Mirbeau, Maupassant has little faith in the justice system. Through their gendered discourses of violence, the female murder victims embody this dystopian outlook.<sup>36</sup> Maupassant's search for an alternate form of justice leads him, like Zola, to rely on imminent justice.<sup>37</sup> What sets "La Petite

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<sup>35</sup> Other critics follow the call made by Lethbridge to create more interdisciplinary readings of Maupassant, including Jonathan Patrick, who argues that Maupassant explores issues of masculinity. Rather than representing misogyny, for example, Maupassant, according to Patrick, is calling imposed masculinity into question. In *Pierre et Jean* (1888), "Maupassant's sympathy is no doubt with Pierre as a man who cannot conform to the expectations placed on bourgeois men, and finds himself an exile from conventional masculinity" (24). My analysis of Maupassant's short stories is consistent with Patrick's in refusing to amalgamate Maupassant and his oeuvre.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy points out that a certain degree of skepticism in the notion of progress became more widespread in the waning years of the nineteenth century: "Confidence in history as a source of guidance for the current generation began to ebb in the late century as Friedrich Nietzsche and others characterized an absorption in the past as unhealthy and anti-progressive" (22). Theories of degeneracy abounded, such as Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1893). As Murphy asserts, such "pessimistic views persistently gained supporters, becoming a significant aspect of cultural discourse as the century drew to a close" (23).

<sup>37</sup> The lack of a search for alternative forms of justice in an unjust world sets Mirbeau apart from Zola and Maupassant.

Roque” apart from *La Bête humaine* and *Le Journal*, however, is Maupassant’s reliance on the intervention of hallucinatory images and the metaphoric use of nature as judge and jury.<sup>38</sup>

Maupassant’s ties to Zola and the naturalist group, evidenced by his inclusion in *Les Soirées de Médan* (1880) and his frequent attendance at important dinners, as well as by the correspondence between himself and Zola (see Benhamou), complicate any over-generalizations. As a myriad of critics (Louis Forestier, André Vial, Robert Lethbridge, and Bernard Joly) have demonstrated, Maupassant distanced himself in many respects from the naturalist group.<sup>39</sup> Halina Suwala best describes the ambiguous position Maupassant occupies in “le champ du pouvoir littéraire” (to use Bourdieu’s term):

Pour ses contemporains, il est naturaliste et il ne l’est pas. Le jugement dépend de deux facteurs: de l’attitude du critique envers le naturalisme et de sa sympathie pour Maupassant. Il est naturaliste aussi bien pour ceux qui, à la fois, admirent son œuvre et exècrent le mouvement. Il n’est pas naturaliste pour ceux de ses admirateurs qui sont loin d’admirer le naturalisme ou pour qui celui-ci apparaît comme une esthétique périmée, sans avenir. (247)

Suwala goes on to prove that Maupassant uses the terms “naturalist” and “realist” interchangeably in his correspondence. In addition, while Maupassant may privately criticize naturalist doctrines—as he does all schools and movements—in his letters to Gustave Flaubert (see Joly and Benhamou), Maupassant never publicly denounces naturalism and shows the greatest respect for Zola, maintaining a close, though not intimate, relationship with the naturalist leader until his own premature death. Zola contributed in many ways to the enduring myths of Maupassant and to the conflation between the man and his work, since it was Zola, upon

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the works of Maupassant, which lack the faith in progress still present in Zola, reveal a general pessimism about history (see Suwala 251).

<sup>39</sup> “La création maupassantienne a été largement influencée par les écrivains comme Flaubert, Goncourt, Daudet, Zola. Mais s’il leur donne du ‘Cher Maître’ dans sa correspondance, il ne se place ni sous le patronage de Goncourt ni sous celui de Zola” (Benhamou 133).

Maupassant's early death, who presided at his funeral. Zola's detailed portrait of Maupassant contains many of the stereotypes that permeate scholarship, particularly the idea of Maupassant "le bonhomme" and "le canotier":

Je le revois encore, tout jeune, avec ces yeux clairs et rieurs, se taisant, d'un air de modestie filiale, devant le maître [Flaubert]. Il nous écoutait pendant l'après-midi entier, risquait à peine un mot de loin en loin; mais de ce garçon solide, à la physionomie ouverte et franche, sortait un air de gaieté si heureuse, de vie si brave, que nous l'aimions tous, pour cette bonne odeur de santé qu'il nous apportait. (Joly 205)

Thus Zola establishes a view of Maupassant that will interlace with the reception of his œuvre. This historical context enables us to better understand some of the earlier origins of biographical preoccupations with Maupassant, as well as the degree to which the two men were involved in each other's lives and work. Maupassant's own style, including the use of free indirect discourse and slang, reflects his literary influences and associations.

Indeed, Maupassant and Zola had several fundamental literary beliefs in common, particularly in their admiration of the ways in which Flaubert innovated narrative, including "impersonnalité, élimination de l'intrigue, occultation de la composition, nouvelles conception et méthode de présentation des personnages, refus de l'analyse psychologique, importance attachée à la description" (Suwala 251). I show how the impersonality of Zola and Maupassant leads them both to convey their judgment through imminent means, often relying on the supernatural. Both authors integrated Flaubert's techniques into their own writing. In addition to these similarities, Benhamou attributes a belief in determinism and an importance accorded to "le tempérament" (135-36) in Maupassant. In matters related to crime and sexual violence, determined behavior is key, and "milieu" underlines the import of STCs in descriptions.

From the vast amount of literature on the subject, what emerges is the sense that Maupassant may have been temporarily affiliated with the naturalists in order to further his career as an ambitious young author. His own writings substantiate this claim, as he systematically aligned the publication of his works with those of Zola, signaling their parallelism.<sup>40</sup> His contribution to *Les Soirées de Médan*, “Boule de Suif,” not only stood out initially from the rest of the collection (as Flaubert noted), but also has remained one of Maupassant’s most enduring texts. Maupassant’s close relationship with Flaubert may have prevented him, philosophically, from openly adhering to any literary movement, as his mentor rejected all such associations.<sup>41</sup> As Maupassant concludes, “Qu’importe, du reste, les doctrines, puisque seules les œuvres restent” (“Emile Zola,” *Chroniques* 82). More important than these biographical facts and fabulations, however, is the fact that on a structural level, Maupassant’s fiction has deep ties to naturalist beliefs. The lessons learned from both Flaubert and Zola were applied to his literature with exceptional results.<sup>42</sup> It is in this vein that I situate Maupassant as a brilliant writer who gleaned useful tools from his respected colleagues and friends, and whose œuvre is girded by naturalist poetics. I concur with Lethbridge that “[s]tudies measuring Maupassant against the criteria of Zola’s Naturalism [...] must proceed, it has also been shown, on the basis of pragmatic effects rather than theoretical affinities” (191). My analysis is highly pragmatic, focusing on close

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<sup>40</sup> “Dès leur sortie et quand ses yeux ne le font pas souffrir, Maupassant dévore les romans du Maître de Médan. Il sait également le bruit que produit la parution des œuvres de son concurrent. Dans une lettre à Victor Havard, il explique sa tactique pour sortir le recueil *La Petite Roque* après la vague que provoquera *L’Œuvre* [1886]” (Benhamou 131).

<sup>41</sup> “Maupassant n’était pas un théoricien de la littérature. Il ne souhaitait ni faire école ni créer un mouvement autour de théories qu’il jugeait sclérosantes et fumeuses” (Benhamou 118). While Maupassant rejected naturalist theory, he was one of the only critics to foresee that Zola’s work would outlast his theories: “Maupassant semble en effet avoir compris bien avant la critique de l’époque que la production de Zola valait mieux que l’attirail doctrinal pesant qui l’étouffait. Il a pressenti que l’œuvre zolienne survivrait à la théorie et en dépit d’elle par ses seules qualités esthétiques et stylistiques” (137).

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Joly goes so far as to conclude that Maupassant is inspired by characters in Zola enough to reproduce them in his own work. Joly cites Maupassant’s special appreciation for the violent figure of Archangais in *La Faute de l’Abbé Mouret* (1875) that finds its place in *Une Vie* (1883), and cites other examples of intertextuality between *Bel-Ami* (1885) and *La Joie de vivre* (1884), a novel Maupassant devoured in one night.

reading of naturalist narratives, rather than simply a discussion of the naturalist movement. In choosing my battles, I would rather concentrate on what naturalist narrative techniques *do* in the texts (rather than discussions of naturalism itself) in order to establish the fact that a complex poetics exists, one in which the rhetoric of rape plays a large role.

In Chapter Four, I consider Mirbeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*. Mirbeau certainly examined the theme of murder and crime at length in his prior novel, *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899), set in China. With *Le Journal*, he stays closer to home, illustrating the "failles" of the French justice system through an unsolved series of petty and violent crimes in rural Normandy. Previous criticism has taught us much about this novel, especially the continuing efforts of Pierre Michel, Claude Herzefeld, Samuel Lair, as well as of Robert Ziegler and Serge Duret. Michel's critical introduction to the novel is very useful, such as the presentation of the novel's development from inception to published form (339-67).

New documents, including correspondence between Zola and Mirbeau, have resulted in a revision of some criticism. Joy Newton shows that Mirbeau and Zola were closer than was previously imagined, and at the time of *Le Journal*, they were probably the closest they had ever been, brought together by the Dreyfus Affair. In 1899, Mirbeau even went so far as to pay Zola's fine, levied against him by the government during the trial (Michel, "Mirbeau et l'amende de Zola" 211). Besides their biographical ties, Zola admired *Le Journal*, and "unhesitatingly picked out the allegorical message" of Mirbeau's previous novel, *Le Jardin des supplices*, as "an attack on the Establishment which allowed Dreyfus and his supporters to be treated so ignominiously" (Newton 54). We can apply Zola's remarks to *Le Journal* as well, in so much as the Dreyfus Affair reshaped both the structure of the novel (dating of events), and its form and content (references to the Affair, in particular).



In *Le Journal*, Mirbeau uses misogynous images with an anarchic bent to question patriarchal values.<sup>43</sup> On one hand, he shows a courageous perspicacity in giving so much importance to female sexuality and to sexual assault. As I show, the portrait of Célestine is ambiguously misogynist, given how rape was viewed in the Belle Époque, but the portrait of how she considers her own desire is unambiguously sexist. “In some characters, female sexuality is equated with a sort of sadism,” as in Célestine’s case (Gemie 80). For Mirbeau, crime becomes a weapon in a world that offers no aid to marginalized figures, stigmatized by the social and political systems, dominated by a bourgeoisie depicted as greedy and hateful. The relationship between sexual violence and anti-Semitism in Mirbeau serves as a deep critique of the Third Republic, suggesting that the government provides no avenue of justice of innocent victims who are from socially marginalized groups.

The goal of my research is to transform our understanding of the narratological and social function of gendered literary violence. My analysis consists of two threads, one revealing the structural complexity and ambiguity of the portrayal of crime and punishment, the other the central role played by the victim of sexual crimes in the narratives themselves. In the next chapter (Chapter One), I lay out the critical framework for my study. Drawing on feminist literary theory and the work of feminist geographers, I suggest concrete ways to study sexual violence in literature. Whether functioning as action or description, naturalist narratives of sex crime rely heavily on spatio-temporal elements. In this vein, I give a brief overview of the study of space and time in literature before suggesting that these texts contain an apparatus that plays with space and time in new ways and in which the crime scene is essential to understanding the underlying narrative structures of each work. This model from Chapter One will then be illustrated as a way

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<sup>43</sup> For Mirbeau, family and love are not stable elements, particularly after the extreme Right’s appropriation of the theme of family at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. For Gemie, the Dreyfus Affaire (the moment when Mirbeau changed from the Right to the Left politically), “encouraged Mirbeau to reconsider the political symbolism implied by his use of the family as metaphor for the state of the French society” (94).

to study STCs of sexual violence in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, while Chapter Two examines how Hugo's text functions as a precursor to later naturalist works.

For each of these authors, treating the theme of crime allows him to show each step in the judicial process, as well as each of its inherent errors, notwithstanding the creation of criminology and its supposed "objectivity." By using the same sexual crime as a theme in each text, writers make these feminine victims symbols of the sacrifice of innocence in an unjust world, underlining the corrupting aspects of power in political institutions. How do we combat the very erasure of sexual violence as a discursive construction in texts in which they abound? Judith Butler provides one possible answer, stating that, "if the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing" (*Gender Trouble* 32). I show in the following chapters that texts containing gendered tropes of violence function as a form of social domination. In my reading of these naturalist narratives, however, I endeavor, in the words of Bal, "[t]o ask, not primarily where the words come from and who speaks them, but what is being proposed for us to believe or see before us, hate, love, admire, argue against, shudder before, or stand in awe of" (*Narratology* 224). Rather than taking sexual violence for granted as a natural part of the background in life and art, my goal is to reveal the dynamic aspects in the literary use of sexual violence—the ways in which these rape-murders function as structuring elements throughout the texts, the manner in which examples of sexual violence consistently exaggerate and deform the realities of sexual abuse, as well as the extent to which these victims of these rape-murders (often undeveloped characters) regain agency by way of their importance to the text's poetics.

## Chapter 1

### **Gendered Discourses of Violence in Naturalist Fiction: Toward a Spatio-temporal Poetics**

A variety of objects—from texts to urban space—are now being rethought in terms of spatio-temporal considerations by diverse fields of study. In some ways, this shift repeats what occurred in the nineteenth century, since Zola's theories and those of the scientist Hippolyte Taine (on whom Zola relied) drew on geography to deconstruct the term "milieu," as Mitterand explains in his preface to Zola's *Écrits sur le roman* (14). Mitterand goes on to compare Zola's writing to cartography: "It is thus not sufficient to repeat that Zola's craftsmanship is responsible for a fictional world notable for its internal symmetries and rigorous formal design. Its topography is as deliberately mapped as that of a cartographer, and yet it is controlled by an inner logic rather than serving to reinforce the referential illusion" (*Zola and the Craft of Fiction* 80). Zola's massive preparation for the writing of the *Rougon-Macquart* attests to an almost obsessive preoccupation with geography. The critic observes, however, the lack of criticism that focuses on spatial analysis: "Much work remains to be done to chart and account for what is distinctive about Zola's handling of spatial setting, as compared to that of other nineteenth-century novelists (80)." Taking into consideration temporality and gender, I endeavor to answer Mitterand's call by studying narratives of gendered violence, with a focus on certain key narrative elements (space and time) that demonstrate such an "inner logic" like that of which Mitterand speaks.

Bal provides the most useful narratological model for this study. Unlike other critics, Bal places heavy emphasis on both space and gender. Moreover, she demonstrates how important

character is to the study of space and argues that neither has been sufficiently investigated:

“Together with character, few concepts deriving from the theory of narrative texts are as self-evident and have yet remained so vague as the concept of space” (*Narratology* 132). By the same token, she neglects—as do many others—the concept of time in her literary analysis. Indeed, in her division of fabula, story, and narrative text, she separates spatio-temporal elements in a way that makes a unified spatio-temporal approach more difficult, if not impossible.<sup>44</sup> Bal’s reflection on the semantic aspects of space and character is a good stepping off point for the explanation of my proposed model for analyzing spatio-temporal construction.

In all of this, I want to underline the importance of the spatial imagination, because, as Weisgerber points out, literary space is completely imaginary. While critics spend time reminding us that we cannot overanalyze characters because they are not real, what is referred to alternately as “background,” “description,” “milieu,” “setting,” is too often taken for granted as a fixed reality. Bal remarks on the history of the negative view of description in criticism: “As it tends to go in such cases, discourse on description is either critical or defensive. Description is accused of interrupting the flow of narrative, of stopping time in its tracks” (“Over-writing as Un-writing” 591). Bal seeks rather to show how description promotes narrativity in what she calls a “description-bound narratology of the novel” or a “descriptology” (591). She points out that calling descriptions realist serves only to naturalize them, thus neglecting their imaginary character, just as Genette’s idea of non- or zero-focalized description masks the ideological visions behind all representations. As she explains, “Representation is possible precisely because

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<sup>44</sup> Drawing on previous structuralist criticism, Bal seeks to create a new set of topologies for evaluating narratives. Rather than simply divide the text into fabula and *sujzet*, concepts taken from Russian formalists, Bal proposes three layers: narrative text, story, and fabula. She defines “story” as the “principles of ordering” (*Narratology* 8), and a text as the story “converted into signs” (8), or “a text in which a narrative agent tells a story” (16). For Bal, description is a “privileged site of focalization” (36), and she defines description as the “textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects” in the narrative (36). Bal notes the historically negative view of description dating back to Homer, who saw description as the easiest element to cut from narrative without sacrificing the story.

it *cannot copy*, and it is culturally relevant because it will not try” (592). In fact, Bal contends that the word “description” suggests “un-writing.”<sup>45</sup>

I analyze a range of male and female characters whose textual identity is bound up in spatio-temporal considerations, and I consider their spatio-temporal violability or empowerment. By violability, I mean that some characters’ behavior is subject to spatio-temporal constraints and obstacles: they cannot go where they please without certain narrative ramifications. This idea echoes Mitterand’s notion of a naturalist “inner logic.” Patterns emerge not only between texts but also within a single literary text in relation to specific spaces and times as well as to human behavior and consequence. The striking similarity of the spatio-temporal apparatus between these three texts points to an evolution in narrative.

In the following pages, I continue with the theoretical groundwork for this dissertation. First, I map out an analytical model for studying narratives of gendered violence (“Proposal for a Spatio-Temporal Analytical Model”). Next, I look at how space and time have been studied thus far in literary criticism (“Space and Time in Literature”). Included is a brief discussion of the legacy of feminist geographers and feminist literary critics. I then situate the historical concept of violence in *fin-de-siècle* France. Vigarello’s analysis is particularly useful in my discussion of the use of rape-murder in naturalist fiction, because he differentiates between the new valorization of childhood—and as a consequence the condemnation of child rape—and the continued ambiguities around the rape of an adult female. I use Vigarello’s work to complicate the tropes of gendered sexual violence, in part to explain some of the sources for the eroticization of rape.

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<sup>45</sup> “A descriptological history of the novel thus becomes a history of binding. Description binds elements and aspects otherwise disconnected, whatever their ontological status. What needs binding, what appears disconnected, depends on the relation between the novel and the world (of the readership). This turns description into a form of world making that is distinct in yet another sense from the illusory sense of mimetic representation. There is nothing realistic about that. On the contrary: fiction makes worlds, hence, undoes (the self-evidence of) that form of world making we think we know” (Bal, “Over-writing as Un-writing” 608-09).

### The Naturalist Spatio-Temporal Analytical Model

In my study, I extend Bal's theory, which she likens to a rhetoric of space, by suggesting that these texts include a spatio-temporal model for literary analysis. All I have done is to make the model inherent to each text more explicit by organizing the apparatus into a subset of elements. Teasing out the intricacies of this model has the merit of unifying elements related to space and time that are, in other topologies, parceled out and left to fend for themselves, so to speak. I distinguish six elements of this new poetics. These writers show how an event, usually traumatic, leaves aftershocks that resonate throughout the text. In each chapter, I elucidate how this model is present in each text, allowing us to closely analyze gendered discourses of violence in relation to space and time.

- **Selection:** ST elements of crime scene (description of body, environment, time of day)
- **Structure:** placement of above elements within crime scene
- **Position:** when crime scene takes place in the narrative and/or the discourse
- **Evocation:** how the text builds up to the crime scene and/or flashbacks to the criminal act
- **Mirroring:** mise-en-abyme of spatio-temporal environment (or the “regardant regardé”)
- **Function:** overall narrative purpose served by representation of rape-murder

**Table 1-1:** Elements of Naturalist Spatio-Temporal Apparatus

(1) The **selection** of spatio-temporal elements includes aspects of nature, landscape, architecture (buildings such as houses, stores, monuments, etc.), transportation, and time of day. In addition to this last, we can include other temporal elements, like references to time-keeping devices, season, and underlying temporal ideologies (time as utility, for example). Beyond space and time, we can include agents that influence these elements or that may function as one: characters, personifications, or narrators. The crafting or shaping of a particular literary space depends not only on description or landscape (which Bal separates), but also on character:

“Character is intuitively the most crucial category of narratology, and also the most subject to projection and fallacies” (Bal 115). Many recent studies have examined spaces in a general way—the department store, the home—or certain character types, such as the *flâneur*. I maintain that we cannot separate character from the spatio-temporal apparatus if we are going to discover the function of that apparatus. Jean Weisgerber describes the link between characters and space: “L’espace du roman n’est au fond qu’un ensemble de relations existant entre les lieux, le milieu, le décor de l’action et les personnes que celle-ci présuppose, à savoir l’individu qui raconte les événements et les gens qui y prennent part” (14). An incomplete presentation of the ST system at play in the narrative text will only lend further credence to the notion of description as static “background.”<sup>46</sup>

(2) By **structure**, I refer to the organization and hierarchy of a description. For this aspect, Hamon’s work on descriptive analysis is essential. In addition, Harvey provides a “grid of spatial practices” that is especially useful for evaluating the structure (and function) of an STC (222). Harvey adds four conditions to Henri Lefebvre’s three types of spatial practice (experience, perception, and imagination): accessibility and distancing, appropriation and use of space, domination and control of space, and production of space. Within the conjunction of imagination, domination, and control of space, Harvey lists “unfamiliarity; spaces of fear; property and possession; monumentality and constructed spaces of ritual; symbolic barriers and symbolic capital; construction of ‘tradition’; spaces of repression” (221). In my study, I examine spaces of fear, or rather, STCs that suggest fear and anxiety. These constructions often intersect with some of the other spaces enumerated in Harvey’s list. For example, a space of ritual can become a space of fear after a sexual attack, as in Maupassant’s “La Petite Roque.” As I show,

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<sup>46</sup> Genette, for example, distinguishes between action and description in terms of temporality, discussing how time is seemingly suspended in descriptions (see “Frontières de récit” in *Figures II*).

however, we can include repressive temporal regimes to those of space. This is not a criticism of Harvey's work, but rather of critical work in general that continues to divide space and time.

(3) By **positioning**, I refer to where an STC occurs in a narrative, such as the opening chapter of *La Bête humaine*. By examining the repetition of spatio-temporal concerns, we can isolate certain scene developments, rather than lump all of them together as much criticism does, thereby masking the sequencing created by the narrative text. We must, then, be attentive to multiple references to the same STC, continually reshaped as the text continues. We should ask ourselves how a particular scene changes form, and where these evolutions/deformations take place within the text. This positioning occurs at all points of the narrative, from the beginning (*Ferragus*, "La Petite Roque"), to the end (*Thérèse Raquin*, *La Terre*), and in the middle (*Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*).

(4) **Evocation** is anticipating or calls attention back to a specific STC in a narrative using either prolepsis (anticipation) or analepsis (flashbacks).<sup>47</sup> Manifestations of evocation can include repetition, retelling, and the utilization of multiple points of view (see Hamon). Evocation differs from positioning in that the latter designates where a significant spatio-temporal event is located in the text, while evocation concerns how the narration refers back to (or predict) that episode. By repetition, I do not mean constructions that refer to the same place, but rather, for example, to the recollected experience of an incident (situated in a discrete STC) by a character. The same STC (in this case, the rape-murder of a young girl) is constantly brought up at different points in the narratives under study. In *Le Journal*, a character anticipates the major STC (the rape-murder of the young Claire) through the narrator's own traumatic childhood. The event itself sometimes precedes the narration (as in *La Bête humaine*), and the detailed description equates to

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<sup>47</sup> Genette offers the most thorough review of these rhetorical devices in "Discours du récit" (*Figures III*).



a classic *hypotypose*. The way that violent sexual crimes haunt various characters points, I argue, to the larger function of the STC.

(5) **Mirroring** involves embedded spatio-temporal views, what we can call the “regardant regardé,”<sup>48</sup> or in some cases, “le voyeur vu.” One instance of this phenomenon is when the narrator in Balzac’s *Ferragus* observes the romantic flâneur Auguste de Malincours, who himself is watching and stalking a woman. Examples of mirroring generally employ ironic distance and are formally or just implicitly presented in narrative as critiques of ways of seeing/reading a given environment. Naturalist writers criticize the voyeurism found in mirroring, even questioning our ability to survive if we err in our readings of space and time. In fact, naturalist texts in some ways anticipate the twentieth century’s preoccupation with the inability to locate one’s true self (or even “one” true self) in time or space, as in Marcel Proust.

(6) The last element in this spatio-temporal model, **function**, is perhaps the most important. I define the function of the STC as the communication of a message, whether explicit (a socio-political view) or implicit (reinforcing traditional gender and class roles). This point of view is communicated through elements of the STC, using the environment (both urban and rural) to suggest a more overarching idea. For example, naturalist texts tend to suggest through ST elements that society and government are ethically bankrupt. Uncovering the function of STCs will help us discern their ideological aspects, what Bal refers to as their semantic content.

### Space and Time in Literature

For Mitterand, “Le temps et l’espace sont deux catégories fondamentales du roman” (*Zola: l’histoire et la fiction* 179). In the history of narrative studies, spatio-temporal structures have always been at the heart of critical texts, such as Mikhaïl Bakhtin’s chronotope. The concept

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<sup>48</sup> My thanks to Professor Jean-Claude Vuillemin for help forming this term.

of the chronotope remains fundamental for a broader understanding of narrative and literary history, but is too totalizing to allow much close reading. More contemporary studies too often mine literary texts for examples rather than develop a significant topology of underlying narrative structures. Mitterand makes the apt remark that nineteenth-century literature, by the nature of its very spatio-temporal structures, shows an acknowledgement of the importance of space and time that predates Bakhtin's criticism.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Mitterand criticizes the subordination of space to time in much criticism, including Bakhtin's.<sup>50</sup> For Bakhtin, according to Mitterand, "C'est le temps qui dynamise et dialectise l'espace; et, dans le récit, c'est le temps qui dynamise la description aussi bien que la narration" (182). The notion of the chronotope can, however, be useful to our analysis.

Mitterand defines the chronotope as "un composé qui, dans sa morphologie même, témoigne du caractère indissoluble que Bakhtin reconnaît à la solidarité du temps et de l'espace, dans le monde réel et dans la fiction romanesque" (*Zola: l'histoire et la fiction* 181). While I question the use of the term "indissoluble" because of its suggestion of fixity, I find that many aspects of Bakhtin's chronotope can be adapted to the needs of this dissertation. Mitterand distinguishes six characteristics for the term "chronotope." First, the chronotope "désigne tout univers humain déterminé consubstantiellement par une époque et un lieu, et aussi une vision, toute représentation homogène d'un tel univers, tout tableau du monde intégrant la compréhension d'une époque et celle d'un cosmos" (185). In my study, the fictive universe often represents Belle Époque France, recognizable directly through dates and proper names

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<sup>49</sup> What Mitterand calls the "chronotopicit  " is "au c  ur de la r  flexion sur l'esth  tique romanesque, pendant tout le XIXe si  cle. Ne faisons pas de Bakhtin un d  but absolu. Tous les grands romanciers ont intuitivement saisi la solidarit   de l'espace et du temps, l'ont symboliquement repr  sent   [...] et comment  e. [...] On est loin d'avoir   puis   l'inventaire et l'  tude de la r  flexion des romanciers du XIXe si  cle et du XXe si  cle sur cette partie essentielle de leur travail. Les titres m  mes de leurs   uvres majeures [...] forment ensemble un m  tadiscours ininterrompu sur le temps-espace du roman. Ce sont des titres en soi chronotopiques" (*Zola: l'histoire et la fiction* 189-90).

<sup>50</sup> "[Le] chronotope, temps-espace et non pas espace-temps (qui est la formule d'Einstein). La th  orie du chronotope est une th  orie du temps romanesque plus que de l'espace romanesque. Il faut bien prendre garde    cela, et ne pas se laisser tromper par l'adjectif *spatio-temporel*" (182).

(identifying politicians and other contemporary figures), and implicitly through cultural information (trains, descriptions of clothing, etc.). Second, the chronotope is “le trait déterminant d’un genre” (186). How a work represents space and time is often inscribed in the conventions of a genre. A classical work of theater will draw on the unities of time and place, for example. For naturalist narratives, I demonstrate a distinct use of detailed and overly precise descriptions of time and space that are part and parcel of naturalist poetics. Thirdly, the chronotope “devient le principe générateur et organisateur d’une classe d’œuvres dans un genre donné” (186). Within nineteenth-century novels and short stories (two of the genres studied in this dissertation), particular spatio-temporal themes are often treated by several authors—the young man arriving in Paris to make his fortune, the larger role played by public transportation, etc. Next, Mitterand sees an employment for the term that combines chronotopic traits of both genres and subgenres where the “chronotopes entrent en intersection pour définir la formule chronotopique d’une œuvre” (187). An example of this is Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615), which combines courtly literature and its use of the fantastic with the more realistic world of the “roman picaresque.” For Mitterand, this fourth application is an example of “le grand diagolisme des chronotopes” (187). In my study, I show how Hugo combines travel writing with the “roman d’analyse,” and how Maupassant pairs the supernatural with the everyday, crossing generic boundaries to experiment with writing. A fifth example of how the chronotopes can function is in any series of themes or “motifs” of a spatio-temporal nature, including the chronotope of the road (considered the most developed in Bakhtin’s analysis), the bourgeois salon, and meetings (“les rencontres”). In *La Bête humaine*, Zola develops a chronotope of the train, while Mirbeau builds on the chronotope of the road, both resulting in the development of fearful spaces, like those suggested by Harvey’s “grille optique.” Lastly, Mitterand lists a chronotope of what he calls a modal or qualitative category, that of distance, growth, or length. For example, Rabelais applies a chronotope of growth and degeneration. For my study, I show that this modal category is used in

expressing temporal structures, e.g., a series of increasingly precise clock times can connote inner turmoil (*Le Dernier Jour*, “La Petite Roque”).

Mitterand contends that Zola’s fiction teaches us much about how we should study space in literature, to which I would add how we study time in literature. The passage is worth quoting at length:

L’œuvre de Zola nous incite donc à ne pas réduire l’étude de la spatialité romanesque au repérage thématique et symbolique des substances ou des formes fondamentales d’un univers de fiction, à la manière bachelardienne, ni au relevé des affects sensibles et psychiques associés au séjour des sujets dans leur site ou dans leur gîte, ni à la répartition respective des milieux et des sociétés. Les problèmes d’analyse les plus importants commencent lorsqu’on s’avise d’explorer les modes d’engendrement, de constitution et de transformation de l’espace comme composante organique de la narration: comment, selon quelles procédures s’énonce-t-il, comment se dispose-t-il, non lui-même en actant, mais pour le déploiement du système actanciel et pour la programmation des phases de l’histoire ? Comment enfin s’y opèrent les ajustements, les bouleversements ou les liquidations du jeu des positions et des trajets ? (*Zola: l’histoire et la fiction* 212)

Mitterand finds Zola’s dystopian spaces to be incompatible with Gaston Bachelard’s views. I would underscore “l’espace comme composante organique de la narration,” and add temporality as a further “organic” component of narration. Indicating that Zola goes even further than Taine in his determinism (with Taine’s “milieu” becoming a “lieu-milieu” in Zola), Mitterand suggests that what remains unexplored in Zola is the degree to which he heralded the use of new twentieth-century narrative structures.

Several critics have commented on Zola's use of space throughout his novels, and in *La Bête humaine* in particular. Mitterand lists three spatial elements in Zola's writing—experience, perception, and imagination. The compartmentalization of space and the negation of the social order are particularly stressed in *La Bête humaine*.<sup>51</sup> Brian Nelson underlines Zola's "use of the railway as a metaphoric and spatio-narrative device" ("Blood on the Tracks" 13). For Nelson, there is a clear positive and negative value attached to different perspectives and references.<sup>52</sup> For Baguley, "*La Bête humaine*'s focus on the myth of man's bestiality is largely articulated through the use of space—the types of spaces associated with the railway" (13). We can see spaces of violence in the train compartments, the town (and surrounding area) of Croix-de-Maufras, and the train company's boarding house near the Gare St. Lazare. Mitterand likens the fictional town of Croix-de-Maufras to a "lieu frappé de malédiction" (*OC* 1737). Séverine was abused in the "chambre rouge" of Grandmorin's house in Croix-de-Maufras, and Louissette was killed in the area around the house, as Cabuche tells Judge Denizet.

For Mitterand, while any study concerned with the novel must take into account the representation of space, Zola is unique in his use of spatio-temporal structures:

Zola est doublement un grand romancier de l'espace, [de l'espace du livre, de l'espace géographique], celui qui distribue le sol, voire le sous-sol, en régions, en

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<sup>51</sup> "[D]'abord celle qu'il porte à l'être là, à l'habitus du sujet et en particulier aux situations de déracinement, de dépaysement, de déstabilisation, d'inadaptation [...] [...] En second lieu, l'intuition attentive des compartimentages de l'espace social, et notamment de l'espace urbain [...] [...] En troisième et dernier lieu, et non la moindre, une attention plus proprement poétique, et plus ironique, au désordre, à la négation ou à la dénégation subite de l'ordre institué, à la catastrophe, minime ou grandiose, qui anéantit le dispositif" (*Zola: L'histoire et la fiction* 211).

<sup>52</sup> "What is normal (reflected in the daily regularity of travel) is set in opposition to what is aberrant and pathological (expressed in violence and murder). Civilization is equated with rules and regulations, the primitive with a state of chrono-spatial dislocation and indirection. This double register is a Manichaean one, in which the poetics of space correspond to an opposition between a chronotope marked by positive references (to progress and the future) and a chronotope marked by negative references (to regression into crime, murder, bestiality, and the past" (Nelson 16). Any study of spatio-temporal narrative structures can little ignore the contribution of Bakhtin to the study of the novel in this regard. Bakhtin's "chronotope" has been used by many critics to analyze space and time in the novel, as well as other genres. Bakhtin analyzes the chronotope in the works of Dante Alighieri, François Rabelais, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in his *Esthétique et théorie du roman*. Mitterand adds Zola to this list, with a close reading of *Germinal* (1885) to illustrate his concepts.

paysages, en quartiers; espace de la vie individuelle, celui qui fournit à chacun de nous ce que j'appellerai son horizon d'attente, l'espace où il vit et qu'il vit, celui de ses mouvements, de ses désirs ou de ses souffrances; espace social, enfin, qui répartit les foules, organise et règle leur travail et leurs conduites. C'est la substance même de la description et de l'action romanesques. (*Zola: L'histoire et la fiction* 200)

Among Zola's works, Mitterand cites *La Bête humaine* as representative of the unique Zolian universe of time and space, what he calls a type of "construction-énonciation d'un espace dysphorique, par le héros-sujet du roman" (212). Dominated by routes and timetables, "quel univers [est] mieux ordonné et mieux réglé dans l'espace et dans le temps, qu'une ligne de chemin de fer?" (Mitterand 212). While Mitterand does not analyze *La Bête humaine* in detail, the novel's depiction of a rail company aptly exemplifies his idea of a dystopian space where an established system slowly comes apart at the seams, where "[le] jeu tourne mal, parce que quelqu'un, quelque part, n'en admet plus les lois" (210). The world of locomotives and their management is such a perfect pathological space that illustrates the "dérèglement du réglage" (210): "L'espace ferroviaire de *La Bête humaine* n'est pas plus rassurant, avec sa population de demi-aliénés" (204). I illustrate Mitterand's description of the train in *La Bête humaine* as a dystopian space. I unpack the figure of the "flâneur" to reveal that the novel's inner logic promotes the fearful aspects of new modes of widely-available public transportation.

The descriptions used in this study are particularly relevant to literary critic Hamon's work, specifically his idea of the "regard descripteur," that is to say a description directly motivated by a character's gaze. If a character does not see something, it cannot logically be included in a description, according to this view. Hamon is particularly interested in the source of visual descriptions. If a description in a literary work is of a panorama or a landscape, the point of view is probably that of a character who has just climbed up on a mountain and is looking out

over the described space. This technique is essential to external narration meant to erase the author's presence. According to Hamon, a key characteristic of the "regard descripteur" is its framing, which becomes the "pouvoir-voir du personnage" that explains key descriptive elements (*La Description littéraire* 266). *La Bête humaine*'s incipit is one of the most cited examples, opening with a character gazing out on the St. Lazare station from his apartment window.<sup>53</sup> For the description to function realistically it is necessary that the narrator linger in view of the street, justifying the perspective. This loitering constitutes a kind of "pause" where the character does not seem able to extract himself, thereby losing some subjectivity.<sup>54</sup> Not only does the character justify the description, but also the vocabulary used, what Hamon calls a "personnage-truchement" who "permet d'en organiser la distribution interne en introduisant, dans la nomenclature lexicale, une distribution, une taxinomie, un ordre" (269). Hamon thus underlines the structural aspects of description, revealing its poetic complexity. His notion of "grilles optiques" can consist of any combination of lists or logical sequences, but all will have in common a type of hierarchy that reveals underlying ideologies. Rather than view a description as "natural," therefore, Hamon's analysis helps us to see descriptions as a system of references based on a particular gaze, in this case one of the serial killer.

Few scholars besides Mitterand and Hamon have shifted to more "geographical ways of thinking" about French literature. Mitterand's remark that "[i]l n'existe pas de théorie constituée de la spatialisation narrative" ("Le récit et son discours impliqué" 193) —notwithstanding the

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<sup>53</sup> As I have found is often the case in Zola (and in Balzac as well), a statement is always included before the actual description attesting to the dreamy coma-like state of the gazer, as if, to become the text's gaze, the character turns into a kind of "looking machine." The expression "devenir tout chose" (found multiple times in Emile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge* [1866], for example), exemplifies this loss of subjectivity.

<sup>54</sup> Even in a "description ambulatoire," with "personnages mobiles," in order for the description to take place, we need a delay that will place the character in front of the spectacle. Hamon explains: "La *pose* (posture) de spectateur réclame une *pause* de l'intrigue, l'oubli de l'intrigue un 'oubli' du personnage, la 'perte de vue' une perte de voyeur, l'abandon du mouvement narratif un abandon du personnage qui 's'absorbe' dans le spectacle" (268). The narrator can thus absorb himself in the "spectacle" of the Parisian street life, as can the reader.

contributions he cites from Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957) and Georges Poulet's *Etudes du temps humain* (1949)—continues to be relevant today. While we find many individual studies of space in Zola's works, these seldom link space and gender, and most neglect temporality and its relation to space.

### ***Gendered Space***

I take my definitions of space from Lefebvre, who in his seminal work, *La Production de l'espace* (1974), envisions space as a “production,” rather than as fixed and transparent (170). A Marxist theorist, Lefebvre shows that to be ignorant of how one travels through space is to ignore underlying power structures that modify and shape our experiences in the everyday world. According to Lefebvre, space is never innocent or transparent, but rather socially constructed, opaque, and constituted by questions of power. As Foucault later states, following the work of Lefebvre, “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (*Power/Knowledge* 252). Zola and other naturalists built the construction of spaces into both their theories and creative works.<sup>55</sup>

While admitting the politics of space, Lefebvre, Foucault, and Michel de Certeau do not examine gender specifically. Continuing to develop my own methodology, I turn to a specific part of feminist theory within the field of human and cultural geography that has contributed substantially to the study of space and time. Feminist geographers show that depoliticizing space (seeing it as fixed) results in a covert legitimization of existing ideologies, with space viewed as natural rather than constructed. In the following section, I highlight how critics apply notions of

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<sup>55</sup> Zola states in the opening lines of his famous essay “De la description”: “Il serait bien intéressant d'étudier la description dans nos romans, depuis Mlle de Scudéry jusqu'à Flaubert. Ce serait faire l'histoire de la philosophie et de la science pendant les deux derniers siècles; car, sous cette question littéraire de la description, il n'y a pas autre chose que le retour à la nature, ce grand courant naturaliste qui a produit nos croyances et nos connaissances actuelles” (*Écrits sur le roman* 273).



feminist geography to literature and explain how my study furthers the analysis of naturalist fiction by using such geographical tools.

It is feminist geographers—such as Doreen Massey, Susan Friedman, and Gillian Rose—who reconceptualized “space” in terms of gender relations by questioning essentialized notions of space. Feminist geographers have contributed to denaturalizing and problematizing the concept of space with regard to gender. Space and time are charged with meaning, as when Mitterand alludes to Zola’s spatial constructions as “sémantisé” (83). Rose notes that feminism, “through its awareness of the politics of the everyday, has always had a very keen awareness of the intersection of space and power—and knowledge” (142). She adds a feminist perspective to Lefebvre’s Marxist understanding of spatial differences in *La Production de l’espace*, noting that women’s restrictions were not “natural,” but instead “constructed,” and in complex ways (117). For Rose, space’s “multidimensionality refers to a complicated and never self-evident matrix of historical, social, sexual, racial and class positions which women occupy” (155). Insisting on the damage done to gender equality when space is understood as “transparent,” she suggests a new kind of space, one that is “paradoxical” and “multidimensional, shifting, and contingent” (140). This new “paradoxical space” will be a site of feminist resistance to transparency (159). “Fixity,” then, can be linked to dominant ideologies, while shifting space lends itself to resistance from marginalized agents. Such an accounting of space shows the importance of feminism in any conception of space.

Massey explains in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) that feminists should show particular attention to the way space relates to the construction of gendered social relations. Massey views space as “incredibly mobile” and “dynamic,” and thus tied directly to “the social and to power” (4).<sup>56</sup> Rather than being the result of societal organization, for her the “spatial

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<sup>56</sup> The question of gender emerged only after Marxist theorists examined the distribution of industrial jobs during this period. In the 1980s, job restructuring in an international level, and the enormous

organization of society [...] is integral to the production of the social,” and so the danger of viewing space as static “is to see space as the opposite of History, and as the (consequently) depoliticized” (4). In her brief history of the debates surrounding the concepts of space and place, Massey explains that the discussion originated from issues concerning industrial geography in the 1970s. The relationship between narrative and gendered space is an important one to consider in order to understand the construction of gendered social relations. Like Rose, Massey considers efforts to “institute horizons, to establish boundaries” as “attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time” (5). Because these efforts are “culturally masculine,” stemming from “the need for the security of boundaries” and requiring “such a defensive and counterpositional definition of identity,” Massey’s view is that regulating geography is bad because it conforms to a masculine system. In an effort to remedy the absence of women in geographical considerations, Massey examines nineteenth-century industrialization in Europe, which changed “existing relations between men and women,” tearing apart the “old patriarchal form of domestic production” (191). Drawing on Elizabeth Wilson’s text, *The Sphinx in the City* (1992), Massey notes that women in cities represented a threat to men, in that the city offered them more freedom, and thus for men less control.

Friedman unpacks the complex relation of narrative to culture in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998). Her call to “avoid gender as an exclusive category of analysis” and to move toward “geographical ways of thinking about identity” (10) is a

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subsequent social and economic shifts, made it plain that “geography matters” (254). Massey considers the view of fixed space even more dangerous because “ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations” (2). In fact, she goes so far as to say that “the spatial is social relations ‘stretched out’” (2). Gender, therefore, is fundamental to any consideration of social relations in space, because the “gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live” (186). This concept is strikingly similar to Harvey’s explanation of Lefebvre’s work. Here, Harvey explains spaces of representation (including imaginary environments), versus material special practices and representations of space in material practices: “The spaces of representation, therefore, have the potential not only to affect representation of space but also to act as a material productive force with respect to spatial practices” (219). We see this same effect in literature, where narrative is constituted, but also constitutes, social relations.

key part of my theoretical framework. Central to Friedman's argument is the place of narrative, because narrative, with its "insistent representationalism and location of subjectivity within the coordinates of historical space and time," constitutes a site for transgression (233). While many feminist poststructuralists have been mistrustful of narrative, Friedman argues that the criticism of "narrative's representationalism and mimetic reference to 'real' experience risks ethnocentric cultural erasure of those writers who come from marginalized cultures rich in narrative traditions" (233). The investigation of literary space is pertinent to feminism because such analysis reveals the politics of identity, manifested by the way characters are inscribed in spaces. The movement of women outside of prescribed spaces can serve as a form of resistance. In nineteenth-century Europe, for example, something as simple as taking a walk, or forming an opinion, constitutes "breaking out" (Perrot 450).

Minrose Gwin also applies theories of feminist geography to narratives. In charting a "geography of poetics," she outlines how space can be used as a category of analysis, specifically in terms of gender, class, and race (25). In addition, she focuses on the effect spatial mappings have on the reader. For Gwin, space is represented dually, in narrative and in the act of reading, which "can bring us into this experience of otherness in a form of 'space travel' that sustains both aesthetics and politics in the act of reading" (8). Gwin's analysis has heavily influenced my own reading of fiction, drawing my attention to how easily the artificial constructions crafted within narratives can be too often taken for reality. Rather than viewing the naturalist texts under study here as misogynist, however, my demonstration helps to destabilize binary views of naturalist fiction. While naturalist texts do "naturalize" violence against women, the prevalence of hallucinatory vengeance (no longer divine, but often ghostly) on the part of female victims in these texts delegitimizes the crimes that silence them.

Another way to delegitimize the naturalization of gendered violence is through an analysis of language. In an important essay, Sharon Marcus looks at rape as a script and a kind of

grammar. She explains how women are “subjects of fear” and that they “constitute the majority of fearful subjects” (391). She remarks, “even in situations where men are empirically more likely to suffer from violent crimes, they express less fear than women do, and tend to displace this fear onto a concern for their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters which usually takes the form of restricting their mobility by means of warning these women not to go out alone or at night” (395). Men map the possibility of violence onto women rather than themselves, thereby reinforcing conventional gender norms. For example, while rape is commonly represented in Belle Époque literature, rarely do we find male victims, even though young boys were often targets of rape. For Marcus, mapping violence onto women constitutes rape (and its threat) as one of the “microstrategies of oppression” and “one of culture’s many modes of feminizing women” (391). In order to undermine this form of oppression, Marcus suggests rejecting any perspective that views female subjects as inherently rapable. Instead, she suggests that we become conscious of the gendered power plays inherent to rape. In this way, “we can see rape as a *process* of sexist gendering which we can attempt to disrupt” (391). I apply Marcus’s method to naturalist texts, identifying a pattern of rape scripts among Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau. Furthermore, I attempt to undermine the “grammar of rape” by adhering to Marcus’s suggestion to “treat [rape] as a linguistic fact: to ask how the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts good quotation” (389). I concentrate on the first of these, how rape is enacted in narratives. The language I explore is that found in STCs. Rather than not questioning the representation of sexual violence in literature, I examine how naturalist narratives produce through the reiteration of rape scripts the imposition of patriarchal power on female subjects, but how these victims reclaim their voices (and their story) by supplanting the corrupted versions of their stories that have been told (or suppressed altogether).

Other critics, such as Patricia Murphy, have added the concept of time to be taken into account with space. Gendered space and time are where constructions of gender are at the heart of spatial (and temporal) considerations.<sup>57</sup> In the context of this dissertation, time refers to both mechanical time and natural time. By mechanical time, I mean the presence of references to measurements of time in either narration or dialogue (e.g. “il etait deux heures quand...”), as well as the physical artifacts that measure including watches, clocks, or church bells. By natural time, I mean seasons, time of day (morning, evening), and other more cyclical means of telling time. In some cases, there is some slippage between these two designations of time; for example, the precise definition of “matin” varies by culture. We should also remember that even within France, time measurements varied according to the historical period. In the Middle Ages, time was measured in canonical hours (see Le Goff 181)—an example of the relation between time and power (in this case, ecclesiastical power). Those who held political power, e.g. the Church in the Middle Ages, determined how ordinary people measured their days, or as Foucault would say, the form of their self-discipline. I study several selected texts that foreground space and time in ways that display the evolution of spatio-temporal strategies in the nineteenth century.

### *Linking Theories of Gendered Time with Space*

Zola’s famous slogan for his work ethic—“Nulla dies sine linea”—is illustrative of the relation between the measurement of time, writing, and repetition, this last creating additional and often unexpected meaning that is tied directly to the STC of the action. The writer’s own temporal anxiety of meeting a deadline is representative as well of the way cultural experiences

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<sup>57</sup> Harvey neatly explains the relations between space, time, and gender in these practical examples in everyday life: “The organization of spaces within a household, for example, still says much about gender and age relations. The organized spatio-temporal rhythms of capitalism provide abundant opportunities for socialization of individuals to distinctive roles. The common-sense notion that there is ‘a time and a place for everything’ still carries weight, and social expectations attach to where and when actions occur” (216).

of time (and practices) evolve in the nineteenth century, as more writers begin to live off their pen.

While studies seem to abound on spatial aspects of Zola's works, few exist on temporality in naturalism. An essay by Newton and Basil Jackson, "Zola et l'expression du temps: Horlogerie obsessionnelle dans *L'Assommoir*" (1978), though a brief treatment of naturalist time, gives us a place to start. Newton and Jackson make several assertions worthy of further application. For example, they demonstrate that Zola borrows the temporal conventions of classical tragedy in its structure (the novel opens with the morning and ends with the evening). Seeing naturalist novels as, in part, an application of theatrical poetics to another genre suggests a more complex narrative structure than critics have previously recognized. Newton and Jackson also attribute symbolism to the descriptions of timepieces, specifically of the watch face ("le cadran"), representing not only the "la fuite du temps," but also middle-class respectability.<sup>58</sup> My intention is to continue in the vein of Newport and Jackson in my analysis, but I examine two additional symbolic meanings suggested by the works of Zola and others. First, a person's safety has been linked to specific times of day for much of man's history, for both rational and irrational reasons. If the invention of fire served to console mankind's fear of the dark, the spread of artificial lighting in cities during the Belle Époque eased nighttime mobility. Despite the supposed safety afforded by illumination, fears of nocturnal spaces did not cease with the invention of gas lamps or electricity. Rose, citing women's spatio-temporal vulnerability,

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<sup>58</sup> In their analysis of *L'Assommoir* (1877), Newton and Jackson create a kind of "history of the object" within the novel, tracing how Gervaise's acquisition and then loss of increasingly expensive timepieces mirrors her material advancement and decline. At the same time, the persistent presence and foregrounding of these objects suggests, according to Newton and Jackson, a fatalistic premonition of Gervaise's doom, which can function as yet another element of classical tragedy that is transposed into the novel.

underlines the relation between specific spaces and times in an article criticizing methods of time-geography (the temporal factor in human spatial relations):<sup>59</sup>

Sexual attacks warn women every day that their bodies are not meant to be in certain spaces, and racist and homophobic violence delimits the spaces of black, lesbian and gay communities. Thinking about bodies and emotions against their repression of time-geography, then, does not only invoke [pleasures and desires], but can also invoke violence and horror, brutality and fear. In its erasure of these experiences, time-geography speaks the feeling of spatial freedom which only white heterosexual men enjoy. (“Women and Everyday Spaces” 362)

Rose illustrates the way space and time constitute each other. In addition, it is her concept of the erasure of specific experiences that I explore in naturalist fiction. Though initially silenced, victimized characters, particularly those who are marked by fatal sexual assault, function in the narratives under study as haunting extra-temporal presences, undermining the STCs that resulted in their deaths by becoming masters themselves of time and space as well as weakening the increasing hyperlinear and hyper-structured nature of daily life by reappearing in the narration.

I show how this phenomenon is consistent with a view of women as “atemporal.” To be outside of time is to be outside of power. One who masters time (and space) can manipulate others less astute, which is essential for many of the maneuverings demanded by crime fiction, such as committing the “perfect” murder. This strange aligning of “perfection” and “murder” should be looked at more carefully. The idea of ascribing adjectives like “perfect” and “well done” to monstrous acts of cruelty stems from getting away with a crime. A perfect crime requires that the heinous deed to be hidden, as if the murderer had stopped time, moving quickly

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<sup>59</sup> Developed by Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, time-geography looks at the social meanings of temporality in everyday life, such as schedules (*Key Thinkers on Space and Place* 149-52). Hägerstrand has been criticized by feminists like Rose for suggesting that time is completely mappable, rather than allowing for slippages, an idea that clearly draws on poststructuralist thought (see Johnson 832).

while everyone else stood still, which in many cases requires manipulations (actual or figurative) of time and space. The murderer may not stop time, but his awareness of temporal rules and behaviors is such that he (or she) can take advantage of certain slippages and blind spots. It is this mastery of time that causes associations of artistry with crime. Naturalist writers explore criminal's supernatural ability to weave through time and space, but they also criticize unrealistic abilities on the part of fictional characters. Zola, for example, disapproves of Balzac's Vautrin—who appears in *Le Père Goriot* (1835), *Ferragus, Illusions perdues* (1837), as well as *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1847)—as an unrealistic exaggeration.<sup>60</sup> Instead, Zola takes pains in his narratives to show how the maneuvers of a criminal can actually take place. His criminals do not accomplish the impossible, or not for long in any case, since their emotions will eventually betray them. We are far from Vautrin's and Jean Valjean's superhuman-like abilities in naturalist texts such as *La Bête humaine*.<sup>61</sup>

Besides sometimes operating as a sign of conspicuous consumption, time-keeping devices also operate as signs of state control, in terms of the division of time into hours and the progressive rationalization of time (set by the state or, in previous eras, by the church). Patricia Murphy, in her work on temporality and gender in Victorian England, offers an analysis that can be applied to Belle Époque France. As Murphy explains, “Late-century developments in time-based physical and social sciences, a profound esteem for history and progress, and the expansion of schedule-conscious railways fueled Victorians' temporal acuity, while burgeoning discontent, social upheaval, and sexual uneasiness focused interest on increasingly unstable delineations of femininity” (3). According to the patriarchic vision that dominated the Victorian

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<sup>60</sup> “J’avoue ne pas avoir d’admiration pour l’auteur de *La Femme de trente ans*, pour l’inventeur du type de Vautrin dans la troisième partie des *Illusions perdues* et dans *Splendeurs et Misères des courtisanes*. C’est là ce que j’appelle la fantasmagorie de Balzac” (“Le sens du réel,” 189). Zola also qualifies Hugo’s works as “fantasmagories” (“Hugo et Littré” 252). Just as Zola criticizes Balzac’s Vautrin, this suggests that he would equally criticize Jean Valjean for his mastery of space and time.

<sup>61</sup> However, the supernatural is very present in Zola. In the three texts under study here, hallucinatory and supernatural visions of dead victims force living characters to renegotiate their feelings to their own acts, or others if they are not the perpetrator (as in Mirbeau).



age, women were set in direct opposition to men, often in binaries that relegated women to an inferior position, where men were seen as more intelligent and rational, and women were viewed as emotional and irrational, even incapable of advanced thought.

As a result, Murphy contends that late-Victorian fiction was “reductive” in terms of temporality:

A male character's association with linear time becomes a marker of progress, civilization, and modernity, whereas a female character's connection to cyclical time represents stasis, chaos, and anachronism. Male characters are identified with an acute historical consciousness, and female characters are positioned as virtually oblivious to and removed from history—in effect, the fiction suggests, ahistorical. (24).

While Proust would later rejoice in the ability to feel “hors du temps,” writers in the second half of the nineteenth century had a new concern with the binary of order and disorder in all realms of human relations—sexuality, work, dwelling, travel, etc. Murphy frames the unsettled feeling ushered in by new temporal knowledge as profoundly disorienting and producing a kind of crisis, as the consolations of religious time (creationism) were replaced by a world where man was no longer at the center of time and space, a kind of neo-Copernican revolution.

She summarizes this Victorian vertigo (my term) by arguing that “[w]ith the biblical version of creationism no longer providing the solace of a stable temporal continuum, Victorians instead sensed that time was a controlling but uncontrollable force. Humans were merely another form of animal life governed by the relentless and unsympathetic process of evolution and the vagaries of change found elsewhere in the physical world” (12). Zola’s comparison of humans to ants in *L’Argent* (1891), his work on financial speculation and the stock market, serves as an

illustration.<sup>62</sup> While the insect metaphor is not new to literature (see Hollingsworth), nineteenth-century writers renew its meaning through the ramifications of industrialization and evolutionary biology. Comparisons to insects take on mechanical meanings because, as the nineteenth century comes to a close, more and more people are viewed as products of their genetics and as means of industrial production. In fact, references to mechanization pop up repeatedly in Belle Époque narratives, from the word itself (“mécanique”) to the robotic stares of characters. Hamon views such frequent references to mechanics as a way of setting up narrative viewpoints, particularly in naturalism, but I would apply the machine metaphor to characters as video cameras, absent of subjectivity.

Given this general sense of temporal unease, I argue that gendered discourses of violence, as seen in the spatio-temporal constructions under discussion, can be viewed within the binary of “order” and “disorder.” By this, I mean that the use of violence can metaphorically suggest a type of ordering, a kind of violent mathematics. In the later chapters of my study, when I examine the preponderance of rape-murders in texts, I will position the crime as a kind of “subtraction.” Drawing on Murphy, I demonstrate that the binary of order/disorder should be emphasized more than the binary of man/woman (the quotation marks around these essentialist categories is meant to put these terms into question), in order to get around reifying notions of gender that continue to subsist today, if even only as a kind of residue in our thinking. Some binaries may be more theoretically useful than others, if only as point of critical entry into the study of social relations, if we agree that we are still struggling with the pull of other binaries. I stress this aspect not only because it is essential to my dissertation, but also because I believe that, as researchers, we need

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<sup>62</sup> “Jamais, en effet, il ne l'avait vue sous un si singulier aspect, à vol d'oiseau, avec les quatre vastes pentes de zinc de sa toiture, extraordinairement développées, hérissées d'une forêt de tuyaux. Les pointes des paratonnerres se dressaient, pareilles à des lances gigantesques menaçant le ciel. Et le monument lui-même n'était plus qu'un cube de pierre, strié régulièrement par les colonnes, un cube d'un gris sale, nu et laid, planté d'un drapeau en loques. Mais, surtout, les marches et le péristyle l'étonnaient, piquetés de fourmis noires, toute une fourmilière en révolution, s'agitant, se donnant un mouvement énorme, qu'on ne s'expliquait plus, de si haut, et qu'on prenait en pitié” (48).

to be more aware of the possible threat of reification in the framing of our theories. In this way, by recasting the analysis of naturalist fiction through the lens of STCs, I can avoid restating older claims with new vocabulary, and instead problematize notions of gender because I am starting from a degree removed from gender, that is to say, space and time as groundwork for discussing gender.

The fact that the fictional study of murder takes place concurrently with this rationalization of time leads us to certain conclusions that may help to unpack the constructed aspects of time. One can make the argument that the development of crime fiction parallels the development of a nationalized and globalized spatio-temporal order. At the very least, specific texts are so overtly aware of space and time as to make the reader self-conscious of this ST obsession that verges on the paranoid.<sup>63</sup> Within this self-consciousness may lie a bit of space, no pun intended, for revealing the constructed nature of time.

Part of the intention of this project is to work against separating space and time, and not just in terms of scientific discoveries that put the two in parallel, such as Einstein's work on relativity.<sup>64</sup> If we have a text where the narrator notes the clock time once every thirty pages or so, a reader may take no notice. However, if the clock time is insisted upon, in various guises (actual noting of time, prepositional phrases, use of temporal adverbs, etc.) several times within the same page, such as we find in *La Bête humaine*, this repetition leaps out from the page and provokes questions concerning temporality in the work: Why is the narrator so concerned with the passing of time? What is the relation between the narrative tracking of time and the content or themes, among other possibilities (e.g., one character being more concerned with time passing than another? The punctuality of the *fin-de-siècle* demands more critical examination, but by no

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<sup>63</sup> As Alison Finch states, “whilst the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novel will probably, in a dignified generalization, state that the time of day is morning or evening, or that a given building is magnificent, comfortable or poor, Zola tells us the exact hour his miners get up and how the mine is constructed, down to the bolts on which the iron mine-cages come to rest” (45).

<sup>64</sup> His theory was not available until 1905 and cannot be said to have influenced novels written in the 1880s and 90s.

means is this study meant to be exhaustive. I concern myself with just one particular aspect of this obsession with time, that is to say, the relation of time (and of space) to gendered discourses of violence in naturalist fiction.

More important for my study is how the “rule of the clock” focuses attention on smaller units of time in literary texts. I underline the relation between narrative pace and the self-conscious attention paid to temporality (and spatiality). If, as Murphy argues (citing Victorians such as historian Lewis Mumford), time moves more quickly in the late nineteenth century, this is perhaps in part closely linked to its more exact measurement, necessary for the creation of suspense in both popular crime fiction and naturalist fiction. Without the development of the more precise tracking of time, crime fiction might not exist, at least in the varied forms we know, or it would at least have to manipulate spatio-temporal structures in alternate ways that do not depend on clock time. Most of the plots within crime fiction depend on the exploitation of time (and space) by nefarious agents—and on the subsequent inductive reasoning that likewise springs from an advanced spatio-temporal knowledge. One need only recall Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes’s memorization of the map of London and the railway schedules, which allows him to induce the culprit of any particular Doyle story without usually having to leave the comfort of his living room.

As in my examination of space, I believe that the cultural construction of time consists of boundaries that privilege some agents (middle- and upper-class men), while weighing on others (marginalized figures, such as criminals, domestic servants, etc). Anne McClintock shows that temporal ideologies can marginalize not only specific types of women, but also certain men, and that this was done quite consciously by groups in positions of privilege: “Within this trope [of spatialized time to illustrate differences among groups,] the agency of women, the colonized, and the industrial working class are disavowed and projected into anachronistic space [identified with the] prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of

modernity” (235). Note that McClintock, more than Murphy, insists on this “spatialization” of time, thus linking space and time as interdependent in the play of power relations. Agents can test their temporal boundaries, making the edges more visible. Rather than reify spatio-temporal limits, I insist on their constructed aspect as a means of liberation for agents that suffer from their negative features, like feeling insecure in certain spaces at a specific time of day. Murphy makes the point that while male authors can “reinforce conventional gender roles,” she sees some “complications” and “ambivalence even among male authors,” whose fiction sometimes “destabilizes gender boundaries even as it struggles to inscribe them” (27-28). I would go even further than Murphy, and rather than maintaining a binary that views naturalist texts as primarily misogynist, I would distance myself from such arguments. Instead, I hold out more optimism for the possibility of finding sites of subversion within texts, particularly in the role of the young female victims in the naturalist texts studied here.

### **The Belle Époque and Violent Crime**

As newspapers and other forms of media flourished in the late nineteenth century, the criminal *fait divers* was increasingly used as dramatic fodder for fiction.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, concerns with controlling burgeoning urban populations through legislation, combined with the explosion of interest in science, fostered the new field of criminology. For Dominique Kalifa, this century was “obsédé par la question du crime” (*Crime et culture* 9). The late nineteenth century is rife with stories tackling criminal themes. Writers did not simply translate actual crimes into narratives, but transposed *faits divers* to denounce social injustices or to criticize criminal theory itself. We can trace earlier developments of this phenomenon in Hugo’s *Le Dernier jour d’un*

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<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that earlier texts did not use the *fait divers*, Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir* standing out as a prominent example.

*condamné*, and even further back to Voltaire, but it is in the context of criminology and the state's role in managing crime (through increasingly scientific means) that fiction takes a more scientific turn.

Integrating the latest technologies into the state apparatus was one way that the French government of the Third Republic proved itself modern and innovative. For instance, they created a “police scientifique,” which created dossiers for known criminals, and laws targeting marginal figures. The idea of marginality, we will see, crosses over into literary STCs. The French felt the need to forge ahead in all areas of science and technology, particularly in the wake of their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71), evidenced in such displays as the *Expositions Universelles*. By showing that the state could sufficiently “control” its ballooning urban populations, France could regain some measure of credibility after disruptive socio-political events that suggested a chaotic state.

Many Belle Époque writers became interested in this new relation between science and crime. The theme of crime was not new to literature, of course, but a preponderant number of texts in late-nineteenth-century French fiction emphasize criminal acts and their consequences. The portrayal of criminals and their misdeeds have ramifications for narrative structure, particularly with regard to issues of time and space. More than a passing fashion, the criminal type has since become standard in fiction and cinema. However, it is in the Belle Époque that the criminal type, and the narrative representation of relationships between science, crime, and literature, was invented.

Alongside the positivist belief in progress that propelled the development in criminological theory, the Belle Époque was at the same time a period concerned with the general idea of decline and degeneration, at both a social and intimately physical level. Degeneration is a theory of biological origin according to which man is a prisoner of his heredity. He possesses a predisposition to atavist traits that can manifest themselves in succeeding generations. Daniel

Pick, in *Faces of Degeneration* (1993), remarks on the number of texts concerned with the theme of degeneration in the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular between 1870 and 1914. Degeneration theory is rooted in the idea of decline, particularly evident in France after the 1871 Prussian defeat. Whether it is the condemnation of a general European degeneration (Max Nordau) or a celebration of esthetic degeneration (Joris-Karl Huysmans in *À Rebours*[1884]), *fin-de-siècle* texts were preoccupied with the theme of degeneration. The attention given to decline that we find in discourses relating to degeneration and decadence corresponds to a historical period marked by social and technological transformations, including the spread of democracy under the Third Republic (universal suffrage), the expansion of the bourgeoisie, the invention of the telegraph, the rise of the press, and publishing innovations. This attention to degeneration was a pan-European phenomenon, though each country treated the subject differently.

In France, we find a rejection of the absolute determinism of the Italian school of criminology. The French resist “complete fatalism” (Pick 100). At first, degeneration theory was linked to notions of criminality, engendering the idea of the “*criminel né*,” as described by the criminologist Cesare Lombroso in *L’Uomo delinquente* (1876). Published in France in 1886, *L’Homme criminel* influenced a generation of scientists. The French reaction to Lombroso (in the figure of the famous physician Alexandre Lacassagne) became more organized starting in 1886, the same year as the publication of both Lombroso’s work and Gabriel Tarde’s *La Criminalité comparée* (1890). Lombroso argued that the government could classify criminals according to primary anatomical characteristics (cranium, jaw, and body) and secondary characteristics (such as tattoos). However, French scientists remained opposed to any theory that privileged anatomy while ignoring the influence of social environment. Lacassagne, and numerous other doctors belonging to the French school, rejected any criminal theory that did not take into account an individual’s free will.

According to Robert Nye, degeneration theory in France functioned as a kind of neutral terrain between contrasting theories, since all the actors involved in the debate insisted on a difference between the professional criminal (recidivist) and amateurs or those who erred only a single time; “From the outset of the debates on the born criminal, degeneration theory possessed a clear potential for occupying a middle ground between the atavistic criminal of Lombroso and the abstractly free man of the voluntarist metaphysicians and jurists” (124). Later, degeneration theory was applied to a host of domains and its vocabulary permeated the era’s *doxa*. This period of history was particularly marked by a permeable line between science and literature, one that we must analyze to understand the importance of criminal portraits in narrative. Pick describes “the formation and dissemination of a medico-psychiatric and natural-scientific language of degeneration” (2). We see this crimino-medical lexicon at work in Zola, Mirbeau, and Maupassant. While a text like *À Rebours* uses the theme of degeneration in order to criticize universal suffrage, other texts apply the theme of degeneration to political institutions, as in Zola’s comparison of political corruption to syphilis (*Nana*). Science underwent continual transformations, including the creation of new research domains like psychology and psychiatry (thanks to the discovery of the subconscious), anthropology, and gynecology. Literature considered these transformations from the beginning. Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) critiques the professionalization of medicine: the failed operation of Hippolyte’s ankle, for example, or Charles Bovary’s medical education, are tantamount to a nineteenth-century pastiche of Rabelais. Rather than simply insert contemporary scientific concepts into a narrative, Zola disparages these ideas.

In addition to assimilating criminal theory into narratives, writers throughout the nineteenth century drew on other literary genres to reinvigorate the depiction of urban space. According to Régis Messac, authors like Balzac and Hugo were greatly influenced by James Fenimore Cooper, whose work inspired an influx of French texts dealing with “les Mohicans” in



an urban French context, comparing the Parisian underground criminals to “apachés.”<sup>66</sup>

However, Messac indicates that, more than just transposing thematic material, Fenimore Cooper provided Balzac with a new way to write Paris: “On pourrait dire tout aussi bien que le grand mérite de Balzac est d’avoir inventé et mis à la mode une nouvelle manière de voir la réalité” (425). By borrowing from another literary genre, Balzac is able to innovate portrayals of urban space. For Messac, “L’Indien subtil, le coureur des bois, le chercheur des pistes, ont désormais acquis droit de cité dans le roman français; et en même temps ils nous indiquent la voie par laquelle le roman ‘sauvage’ pouvait rejoindre le roman criminel” (428).<sup>67</sup> While Messac notes more pecuniary reasons for authors like Balzac and Hugo to borrow story lines, or reasons that revolve around plot in a simplistic way, he frequently suggests how intergeneric borrowings transform the French novel from the mid-century on.

The Russian formalist Victor Shklovskiï (1893-1984) further elaborates in his classic 1929 work, *Theory of Prose*, how these cases of intertextuality—what David Coward calls “boundary-crossing allegiances”—are more specific than most critics acknowledge, giving special place to the mystery story in a chapter on Sherlock Holmes: “Crime and its consequences all but dominate the detective novel, while in Radcliffe and Dickens we always find descriptions of nature, psychological analyses, and so on. Conan Doyle rarely gives us a landscape and, when he does offer it, it is usually to remind us that nature is good while man is evil” (115). I would add that what Conan Doyle *does* produce is an emphasis on temporality, through train timetables (all of which he has memorized), and times given in testimony that is weighed against logic. Naturalist writers endeavor to give us descriptions of space and time alike.

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<sup>66</sup> “Il n’est pas douteux que Balzac eut l’ambition de transposer l’œuvre de Cooper dans le décor parisien, en lui conservant tout ce que la sauvagerie du décor primitif lui conférerait de grandiose et en l’enrichissant de toute la complexité du décor civilisé” (Messac 424).

<sup>67</sup> Besides Cooper, Messac explains the debt early French writers of crime fiction owe to Anne Radcliffe—*The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)—and Dickens. For more on criminality in Dickens, see Collins.

What we mean by “crime” is very much tied up in a specific era and country, since crimes are part of the cultural *doxa*. In the Belle Époque, when crime and its organization at an institutional level were flourishing, the groundwork was being laid for the eventual saturation (only perceived) of our culture with crime and violence.

### **Violence and Legislation**

The nineteenth century is a key moment in the history of rape. Vigarello comments on the specificity of rape, discussing how the treatment of rape-murder in nineteenth-century journalism, law, and fiction evolved: “entité nouvellement soulignée dans les discussions juridiques, les articles de presse, les peurs collectives de la fin du siècle” (201). He points out how in 1895-96, the *Le Petit Journal* seemed to report on nothing else but this type of crime. Vigarello shows how the press focuses on the most sadistic cases as well as on the marginalization of those usually accused of the crime: “La presse s’en tient aux versions les plus horribles, le viol-meurtre, dénonçant spontanément aussi les groupes sociaux les plus marginaux, indigents ou vagabonds: l’acte le plus exceptionnel, l’acteur le plus rejeté” (225). In *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, we find this exact situation, whereby the local population blames “vagabonds” (also the case in “La Petite Roque”). For Timothy Smith, however, statistics do not corroborate any link the state tries to make between homeless wanderers and violent sexual crimes.

The nature of violent sexual crimes was also a new element in the nineteenth-century, including the abuse of children, which became a privileged subject in literature and legislation. As Rachel Ginnis Fuchs has shown, sexual molestation was not considered a form of child abuse until the Third Republic. She shows that a statistical increase in the incidence of abuse against children “indicates a changing definition of child abuse, and perhaps increased commission and

detection, of the crimes, which may indicate new concepts of abuse” (240). In order to explain this phenomenon, Fuchs examines the case of abandoned children:

The fifteen years between 1874 and 1889—characterized by a change in attitudes toward children, by the assumption of broad powers of the state in the realm of social welfare, and by state regulation of social institutions as a means of ensuring law and order—marked a watershed in the care and treatment of abandoned children. [...] The idea of the state as protector of the children because they are weak and victims of society was pronounced in the early decades of the Third Republic. These new attitudes toward abandoned children and child abuse were part of the accepted attitudes towards children in general.

(253)

Thus the idea of children as potential victims whom the state needs to protect is relatively new. Social views of children have changed, and contemporary legislation reflects this change.

One example of a legal case that helped establish legislation was that of Joseph Vacher, accused and condemned to death for the brutal slaying of several adolescents in the French countryside.<sup>68</sup> It is useful to cite Vacher for several reasons. First, the utilization of the Vacher murders by naturalist writers illustrates the fact that writers feminize victimhood in their narrative choices, since authors only include female victims. Second, it raises issues regarding class, since the French government created several suppressive laws for anarchists and “vagabonds” following this case. The construction of the Vacher episode also explains the proliferation of rape-murder in naturalist texts. Most of the narratives used in this dissertation include references to Vacher. While many scholars allude to Vacher as a model for writers like Zola and

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<sup>68</sup> I discuss Vacher more extensively in the chapters analyzing *La Bête humaine* and “La Petite Roque.”

Maupassant, criticism glosses over the complex ways in which this model (as well as others, including Ménesclou) is used, parodied, and often subverted.

What might this gendered violence indicate about the tensions surrounding women's freedom at a time when rights were becoming more equal? Narratives often reflect the preoccupations of their time, and we can therefore examine what underlying anxieties may have been "worked through" in literature. Indeed, narratives not only reinforced such anxieties, but also abetted in constructing and producing them. By studying the literary uses of rape in relation to spatio-temporal discourses, the constructed nature of rape narratives becomes evident (good).

Vigarello observes how nineteenth-century crime fiction deals with crime:

L'horreur s'est déplacée: la figure noire du roman policier mêlant le sang au vol a cédé la place à la figure plus psychologique du pervers tourmenté mêlant le sang au désir et à la sexualité. La violence sexuelle, celle exercée sur les enfants plus que toute autre, s'est imposée en point ultime du mal. D'où l'inévitable question: effet d'image ou accroissement du crime réel ? (7)

Vigarello neatly summarizes the shifting uses of sexual violence, especially in the press and literature, revealing how the production and dissemination of these tropes is constructed. I draw heavily on Vigarello because of the premise of his work—that a history of sexual violence in French culture and the arts in France shows us more about a particular era than sexual violence itself.

In his experimentation with the literary portrayal of prison experiences in *Le Dernier Jour* and *Claude Gueux*, Hugo also addresses sexuality and sadistic elements of murder. In the next chapter, I consider Hugo's *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* as a precursor to naturalist fiction. The naturalist texts considered in succeeding chapters are very much a product of

previous experimentation with narrative, some as yet unacknowledged. Victor Hugo provides one such neglected model. While much scholarship has been devoted to the legacy of realism, including seminal writers such as Stendhal and Balzac, critics generally shy away from any investigation of the links between Hugo and naturalism. While Zola vehemently critiqued Hugo (1802-85), he nonetheless acknowledged his enormous influence, admitting his obsession with *Les Misérables*. Marie-Sophie Armstrong has written extensively on the links between Zola and Hugo's writing. She maintains that due to the influence of *Les Misérables* on *Germinal*, we can say that Hugo "occupe véritablement une position clé dans l'ensemble de la fiction zolienne et qu'il est, partant, indissociable des origines de cette fiction" (171). In my study of the STCs of violence, Hugo holds an importance point of origin as a precursor in the portrayal of spatio-temporal ideologies.

## Chapter 2

### ***Voyage autour de mon cachot: Spatio-Temporal Structures and Struggles in Hugo's Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné***

Larger than life literary figures often cast a wide shadow, but in the case of Hugo, his popularity influences critical scholarship. As a way to bypass the problematic myth of Hugo, Bradley Stephens advises critics in his compelling survey of the history of Hugo studies (2009) to “return more actively to Hugo’s critical thinking” and to “think more precisely about Hugo’s experimentation with so many different media, and about the possibilities for destabilizing meaning in his work that this experimentation afforded him” (73).<sup>69</sup> One of Hugo’s most experimental works is certainly *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné*, regarded by some scholars as the novel in which he revealed his republican voice.<sup>70</sup> Hugo played with style, subject, and form in *Le Dernier Jour*, and his innovative writing, particularly in his descriptions and narrative structure, anticipated both the exigencies of naturalism and those of modernist writers.<sup>71</sup> Unlike other Hugolian novels, *Le Dernier Jour* eliminates most action and confines itself to a severely limited time frame. In the process, it avoids some of the main charges aimed at Hugo’s writing in general. In particular, Stephens cites Hugo’s tendency to oscillate between a broad and rhapsodic

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<sup>69</sup> Hugo’s myth is a problem not only in contemporary criticism. Zola claimed that for his generation, Hugo “bouche actuellement l’avenir” (“Victor Hugo” 40) and demands “un trop grand respect” (51). Ironically, Zola predicts that Hugo’s legacy will not be long-lasting (70).

<sup>70</sup> “Le condamné qui meurt en 1829 est un ‘moi’ bourgeois, un jeune homme romantique qui possède l’enfance de Hugo et comme une partie de son âge d’homme” (Roman 364).

<sup>71</sup> In chronicling a particular day in the life of one (anonymous) man, Hugo employs narrative strategies usually associated with the twentieth century, most notably with James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Victor Brombert comments on one aspect of Hugo’s early narrative innovations: “Well before modern writers had developed a rhetoric of existential immediacy, Hugo in *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* created a disrupted yet associative mental discourse that allowed for no respite from the self”(28).

overview of a subject (as in the chapters on Paris in *Notre-Dame de Paris*) and a more tightened narrative focus (see 168).

*Le Dernier Jour* was written in the midst of debates on capital punishment and criminality in general, standing as an early example of “réalisme engagé” because of Hugo’s literary interest in these polemics (Roman 63). It is important to situate the novel within these contentious issues in order to better understand its form, particularly for how *Le Dernier Jour* functions as a parody of de Maistre’s *Voyage autour de ma chambre*. Myriam Roman gives a brief history of criminology in early-nineteenth-century France in her presentation of the novel (see 35-61). The laws related to penal reform included the (failed) reform of 1791 to eliminate torture, the 1819 reform under Louis XVIII that created the Société Royale des prisons, and the 1832 reform, which successfully eliminated torture, added “circonstances atténuantes” in considering crimes and eliminated some capital crimes (51).<sup>72</sup> Other societal reforms included a growing interest in phrenology and the liberal sciences. The state’s and scientists’ interest in criminality was furthered by the link made between crime and the lower classes: “La peine de mort pour les crimes de droit commun intervient à une époque où commence à émerger la question du peuple et des ‘classes dangereuses’” (Roman 49). At the same time, criminality began to interest novelists like Hugo and Balzac for its efficient “effet de réel.”<sup>73</sup>

A fictional, autobiographical account of a man’s final day on earth before his execution, *Le Dernier Jour* consists of forty-nine chapters of unequal length, from a paragraph to several

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<sup>72</sup> Roman particularly underscores the importance of the guillotine for understanding the *Le Dernier Jour*’s context. Invented in 1789 by Dr. Guillotin as an emblem of Enlightenment ideals of democracy and progress, “la guillotine” was not put into practice until 1791. Created at the same time as the telegraph, the guillotine was viewed as a scientific marvel that made everyone equal by threatening them all equally with a painful death, rather than decapitating the rich and hanging the poor (the latter was considered much more painful a way to die). The idealistic notions behind the guillotine were overturned, though, when it was turned into an “instrument politique” during the Terror of 1793, wiping out thousands of Frenchmen and women (Roman 39). Furthermore, death by guillotine was not always as quick as promised, and malfunctions resulted in horrific, painful decapitations.

<sup>73</sup> “Les théories scientifiques qui tentent de déchiffrer l’âme à partir du corps commencent à séduire les romanciers, Hugo et davantage encore Balzac, qui y trouvent une justification réaliste et une structure descriptive pour les personnages de leurs fictions” (Roman 56).

pages. For Jean Rousset, *Le Dernier Jour* created the “journal intime” (36-37). It is no coincidence that Hugo should invent a new genre when writing of capital punishment: his novel is “la rencontre [...] d’un thème et d’une forme” and would garner the attention of writers the likes of Dostoevsky (Rousset 38). Prior to *Le Dernier Jour*, Hugo engaged with the debates surrounding penal reform, especially capital punishment and its proponents. Roman views *Han d’Islande*, for example, as a direct critique of the prominent writer on remarks made by Joseph de Maistre on “le bourreau” (42). I continue in a similar vein in this chapter that by comparing Hugo’s *Le Dernier Jour* and Xavier de Maistre’s (Joseph’s brother) *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, we can similarly envision the former text as a criticism of the latter’s politics, as he was likewise in favor of the death penalty.<sup>74</sup> By transposing de Maistre’s parody of travel writing (his voyage consisting of traveling around his bedroom for a day) to a prison, Hugo effectively demonstrates a powerful argument against the death penalty, as well as a backhanded compliment to de Maistre’s narrative style.

Notwithstanding the fact that critics acknowledge Hugo’s novel as a fundamental literary text on capital punishment, it receives far less critical (and popular) attention than Hugo’s more famous later works.<sup>75</sup> Existing studies look mainly at role of Hugo’s prefaces. Discussion of the novel itself often focuses on questioning the diary’s verisimilitude, a debate that almost suggests critics forget that they are looking at a piece of fiction, however ably it portrays itself as a real

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph de Maistre is famously quoted for the following adage: “Le bourreau est la pierre angulaire des sociétés.” Hugo’s response can perhaps be found in *L’Homme qui rit* (1869): “Le calme, c’est la tenaille du bourreau” (OC 103).

<sup>75</sup> The MLA database comes up with thirty-five articles and chapters on *Le Dernier Jour* since 1977, while *Les Misérables* receives one hundred eighty-five references (since 1930) and *Notre-Dame de Paris* ninety since 1942. It is surprising how little work this novel has inspired, considering that it is usually placed alongside *L’Étranger* (1942) as one of the most important texts on capital punishment (four hundred twenty entries in the MLA). Sonja Hamilton details the commercial success of *Le Dernier Jour* (four editions within the first month) and the numerous parodies that soon followed by many acclaimed writers, including Jules Janin.



primary document.<sup>76</sup> The author himself contributes to this reductive view; his 1832 preface belies the complexity and poetics of *Le Dernier Jour* when he describes the novel as only a plea against capital punishment.<sup>77</sup> *Pace* Hugo, the novel is far more than a simple plea. Through my reading of the novel, I investigate its complex narrative structures and reveal compelling reasons to reassess Hugo's text in light of the new mode of writing—precise and detailed descriptions of time and space in relation to crime that was were to become so important in realism and naturalism.

Through its precise temporal descriptions and time frame, *Le Dernier Jour* anticipates narrative techniques later used by the Nouveau Roman, such as restricting plot and temporal framing. I concentrate here on temporality in its diverse forms, analyzing this textual element in a way that previous studies have not. Drawing on the critic Genette's separation of story and discourse time, I argue that *Le Dernier Jour* first separates these modes of time and then brings them together to the point of simultaneity. Hugo's narrative choices are so innovative that they necessitate paratextual and intratextual references to another genre—travel writing. I show how Hugo uses the conventions of travel literature as a way to experiment with more introspective writing. I then analyze ideologies of power in relation to temporality and spatiality in the novel. Finally, I relate how time and mortality are linked to journal-writing and writing in general.

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<sup>76</sup> “Hugo indirectly underscores this contradiction again when the prisoner, some ten pages into the diary, against all narrative logic, first receives ink and paper” (Blix 51). Peter Brooks goes into more detail: “Epistolary novels provide more of a justification for this instant writing, in the use of letters as communication, as a report to another on one's situation. The *raison d'être* of the condemned man's writing is harder to find: to whom does he address his words? Why? If it is quite implausible that he would really be furnished with pen and paper in the three cells he occupies during his last day, isn't it equally implausible that he would be seeking to write at all at this point? The moment for writing would seem to have passed” (537).

<sup>77</sup> “Il [the author speaking of himself in the third person] déclare donc, ou plutôt il avoue hautement que *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* n'est autre chose qu'un plaidoyer, direct ou indirect, comme on voudra, pour l'abolition de la peine de mort” (Hugo 376).

### “Un lieu clos”

While critics like Peter Brooks have concentrated on the lack of verisimilitude in *Le Dernier Jour* when the narrator procures writing instruments and paper at convenient times for the story, I consider these efforts significant for bringing attention to the materiality of writing. By linking this foregrounding of the journal as a textual object (as well as the writing process itself) with other references to writing in other literary genres, we uncover a network of textual and scriptural metaphors in Hugo’s narrative. This network points to the novel as not only a plea against capital punishment, but also as an appeal for a new kind of descriptive writing.

In the 1829 preface to his novel, Hugo calls the text a “roman d’analyse” rather than a “roman de faits,” the latter evoking historical novels à la Sir Walter Scott. Designating *Le Dernier Jour* as a “roman d’analyse” may seem surprising, since this would put the novel in the company of François-René de Chateaubriand’s *René* (1802) and Benjamin Constant’s *Adolphe* (1816). If we look closely at some specific references that the author of *Le Dernier Jour* makes to other novels, in particular travel literature, we find that Hugo is attempting to position his work in an accepted genre whose techniques are very similar to those used in his novel. First, Hugo mentions both “le *Sentimental Journey* de Sterne” and de Maistre’s *Voyage autour de ma chambre* as models for *Le Dernier Jour* in the letter to his editor (428). Within *Le Dernier Jour*, the narrator alludes to travel writing directly. When the condemned man recounts his past life before his imprisonment (Chapter Thirty-Three), he mentions reading the *Voyages* by Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-99) together with his childhood love, Pepita.<sup>78</sup> Why would a novel about imprisonment make explicit references to two eighteenth-century travel narratives? Moreover, why would Hugo mention travel narratives by de Maistre and Sterne as possible models for *Le*

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<sup>78</sup> Hugo’s novel only mentions part of the title. The full title of Spallanzani’s work is *Voyages dans les deux Siciles et dans quelques parties des Appenins* (1799). De Maistre also mentions Spallanzani, in a dream sequence (147).

*Dernier Jour*? Massin dismissed the importance of these intertextual references (see 667). I contend, however, that such references are more than mere indulgences on the part of Hugo. In fact, comparing his novel to travel writing points to a shift in Hugolian poetics and offers an explanation for the stylistics of this shift.

Travel literature is traditionally autobiographical in nature, usually narrating (in the first person) real or imaginary travels to a location of some significant distance for a variety of reasons, illustrating the pleasures of travel and giving readers a means to acquire knowledge about exotic lands. In some cases, fictional travel accounts served as a replacement for travel itself, such as during the Napoleonic wars.<sup>79</sup> Travel literature flourished in the eighteenth century, along with the beginnings of mass tourism and the advent of the Grand Tour, meant to round out an individual's education and world knowledge. *Le Dernier Jour* applies the techniques of travel writing to a story where the main character does not physically go outside his cell, except to move to another penitentiary. Likewise, in *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, de Maistre parodies the conventions of travel writing by undertaking an account of forty-two days of house arrest, with a day for each chapter.<sup>80</sup> In much reduced surroundings, de Maistre compares walking from one end of the room to another to "going north" and calling the room "the country." Kai Mikkonen explains that in travel literature, "typically, an individual or a group of people engage here and now in an act of movement and perception" and the "traversed spaces are unified in the traveler's experience and recounting, which is punctuated by episodes, names of places and local descriptions" (299). While the condemned man does not go very far (though farther than de Maistre), these same characteristics are maintained within confined spaces, forcing him to

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<sup>79</sup> "[...] Gothic fiction initially functioned to supply imaginary *substitutes* for travel to southern European places inaccessible to the English during the Napoleonic era" (Hulme and Youngs 44).

<sup>80</sup> Though now all but forgotten, de Maistre's text was extremely well known in Hugo's day. De Maistre wrote a sequel, *Expédition nocturne autour de ma chambre*, but his brother, who had helped publish the first novel while de Maistre was in St. Petersburg, delayed releasing the second until 1825. Andrew Brown has published a recent translation in English (2004), and Michael Dirda included the novel in his *Classics for Pleasure* (2008).

examine his surroundings in infinite detail. If travel literature takes the reader where he or she has never been, in applying the techniques of the travel genre to a “roman d’analyse,” Hugo is taking us not only to a new place—the prison—but also toward a new way of writing.

*Voyage autour de ma chambre* and *Le Dernier Jour* share many similarities.<sup>81</sup> To name but a few, both describe the imprisonment of a main character who maintains a journal, both address capital punishment, and both assume a royalist stance. Beyond the many thematic and structural similarities, both texts address imprisonment by subverting another genre of writing. It is important to remember that de Maistre is under house arrest. The imprisonment for both, whether voluntary or not, acts as a formal constraint that at first seems to limit the act of writing, but that in fact produces texts that push the boundaries of existing genres, freeing the prisoners through their imagination. Rousset notes the importance of seclusion for the content of *Le Dernier Jour*: “De quoi peut donc parler, plume en main, un incarcéré dans un lieu où rien ne se passe, où personne ne vient à lui?” (43). Both house arrest and imprisonment provide spatial, as well as temporal, constraints that guide Hugo and de Maistre to innovate the method of writing.

The texts also share remarkable structural similarities. Not only are both written as journals; both contain a chapter that displays innovative typographical features tied to the narrative, similar to what we find in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-66).<sup>82</sup> In *Le Dernier Jour*, Chapter Forty-Nine (entitled “MON HISTOIRE”), in which the narrator intends to recount the reasons for his imprisonment, includes only a note explaining that the related papers were lost. Similarly, a note about the circumstances surrounding the journal’s publication follows the end of the novel; each thus treats the text as a real document subject to worldly constraints (i.e., losing papers). This typographical device underlines in a very obvious way the author’s decision not to

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<sup>81</sup> My argument is a departure from Rousset’s (and Massin’s), which, while mentioning Hugo’s letter to Gosselin, dismisses any similarities between *Le Dernier Jour* and de Maistre’s works (see 37).

<sup>82</sup> Chapter Twelve of *Voyage autour de la chambre*, the chapter following a disappointing romantic episode from the narrator’s past, consists of six rows of dots with the word “tertre” (mound) in the middle, this key word referring to the place of the amorous disappointment.

tell this story, so obvious that we can ask ourselves if Hugo is saying something more about narrative and creative writing itself.

Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Spallanzani's *Voyages* are no typical travel narratives anymore so than de Maistre's. Sterne's work (the full title is *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*) is itself a satirical parody of Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* (1766). Sterne's opinion of Smollett's work can best be summed up in Smollett's appearance in Sterne's work under the name "Smellfungus." Unlike Smollett, who espoused the conventional view that travel literature should be objective and instructive, Sterne's text argued for a more emotional and subjective treatment, as the title suggests. Likewise, Hugo compels the reader to look beyond objective arguments that favor capital punishment by presenting an individual's emotionally charged and subjective experience.

Moving to the Spallanzani reference, why would Hugo's narrator describe a youthful, flirtatious encounter with a young lady involving the reading aloud of an extremely dry scientific text? A naturalist who describes what he sees, Spallanzani undertakes in *Voyages* a scientific, detailed account of the flora, fauna, and geological history of the areas traversed rather than a rote description of his travel. According to Mitterand, in the scientific domain naturalists designated "les savants spécialisés dans l'étude des sciences naturelles, et en particulier dans l'observation et l'histoire des espèces humaines" (*Écrits sur le roman* 26). Balzac identified with scientific naturalists, but Hugo does so here in a more subtle manner, metaphorically contrasting a sentimental scene with a travelogue, a possible *mise en abyme* of how *Le Dernier Jour* stands in stark contrast to Hugo's more lyrical works.

As with the atypical travel narratives to which Hugo makes reference, whether in his correspondence or in his novel, Hugo makes a compelling case for innovating the writing of fiction, all the while insisting on the rightful place of such experimental texts within the existing canon of "romans d'analyse." Through intertextual borrowings, Hugo is called upon to rely on

extremely detailed spatial and temporal descriptions, which he applies to demonstrate the violence of the state death machine through which condemned prisoners pass. Only a few critics have focused explicitly on temporality rather than spatiality in *Le Dernier Jour*.<sup>83</sup> It is necessary to examine both for the ways in which spatial and temporal ideologies betray the state's complete power.

### **Spatio-temporal Ideologies: Apprendre à *faire mourir***

While St. Augustine questioned whether we can ever know what time is, Hugo's novel suggests that by the nineteenth century, time has been appropriated by the state and integrated into its judicial systems in terms of imprisonment and execution. In many ways, Hugo anticipates several of the critiques Foucault would make in *Surveiller et punir* (1975), including the rationalization of corporal punishment through temporal regimes. Foucault outlines how the French state drew on organizational models for time management in the army to rationalize the prison system.<sup>84</sup> Through his detailed descriptions of space and time in the prison, Hugo's condemned man shows how, in the midst of his strong emotion, prison life is ordered and scheduled into a fixed routine that promotes emotional indifference on the part of prison employees. The narrator often emphasizes the emotional detachment of prison workers, concentrating particularly on portraits of the confessor (l'aumônier),<sup>85</sup> executioner (le bourreau),

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<sup>83</sup> Critics allude to the precise nature of the novel's descriptions, though usually in relation to the theme of death rather than as an innovative fictional technique. "Nothing of import is allowed to elude this minute attention to reality, the means of his own eventual escape from total oblivion—if not from death itself" (Grossman 112).

<sup>84</sup> Sobanet, in his study of prison novels, remarks that Foucault's work remains important because it "demonstrates convincingly that the prison is an institution whose development, internal organizational processes, architecture, and goals are profoundly linked to the formation of other social institutions and the spaces in which they practice their disciplines and assert their normative power" (11).

<sup>85</sup> Grossman comments on the fact that even in despair, the prisoner is capable of idealism: "One mark of the prisoner's active revolt is that he is able to reconstruct, from this negative experience [meeting the confessor], the kind of confessor he would have liked to have had" (143). Likewise, Hugo's rewriting

and jailor (le geôlier) throughout the novel. Frequent mention of mealtimes (including his lawyer's and the priest's) is just one way that Hugo underlines the way death has become part of their daily routine.

Like the mechanization of death (the guillotine),<sup>86</sup> the movements and gestures of prison workers are mechanized. In Chapter Twenty, the narrator concentrates exclusively on the jailor, depicting him as the embodiment of all that the prison system represents, the gentility of the personnel making the system seem all the more sinister:

Il ne croit pas, ce geôlier, que j'aie à me plaindre de lui et de ses sous-geôliers. Il a raison. Ce serait mal à moi de me plaindre; ils ont fait leur métier, ils m'ont bien gardé; et puis ils ont été polis à l'arrivée et au départ. Ne dois-je pas être content ?

Ce bon geôlier, avec son sourire bénin, ses paroles caressantes, son œil qui flatte et qui espionne, ses grosses et larges mains, c'est la prison incarnée, c'est Bicêtre qui s'est fait homme. Tout est prison autour de moi, je retrouve la prison sous toutes les formes, sous la forme humaine comme sous la forme de grille ou de verrou. Ce mur, c'est de la prison en pierre; cette porte, c'est de la prison en bois; ces guichetiers, c'est de la prison en chair et en os. La prison est une espèce d'être horrible, complet, indivisible, moitié maison, moitié homme. Je suis sa proie; elle me couve, elle m'enlace de tous ses replis. Elle m'enferme dans

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of Claude Gueux's life in the novel of the same name functions as a form of idealism rather homophobia. Hugo writes out Gueux's affair with a fellow inmate, preferring to portray a sexual relationship as a friendship, so that when the state separates the two friends, Hugo's can construct a more acceptable critique of the state.

<sup>86</sup> In Chapter Seven, where the narrator details the reasons for his decision to keep a journal, he laments the celebration of the guillotine as scientific progress (killing without pain) and the lack of introspection on the part of the prison bureaucracy: "Se sont-ils jamais seulement arrêtés à cette idée poignante que dans l'homme qu'ils retranchent il y a une intelligence, une intelligence qui avait compté sur la vie, une âme qui ne s'est point disposée pour la mort? Non. Ils ne voient dans tout cela que la chute verticale d'un couteau triangulaire, et pensent sans doute que pour le condamné il n'y a rien avant, rien après" (286).

ses murailles de granit, me cadenasse sous ses serrures de fer, et me surveille avec ses yeux de geôlier. (314)

The irony of the first paragraph is directly followed by the metaphoric image of the jailor as the jail, the spaces (walls, doors) completed by the workers. The remaining sentences feminize this image of the prison in the repetitions of the feminine pronoun, as well as in the extensive personification, one that prepares the reader for the subsequent dream sequence with the old woman (Chapter Forty-Two).

Space in the novel is mechanized in as much detail as time. Just as each inmate has an assigned schedule, with time measured out to the hour, he is assigned a particular cell, a small measured space within which he must subsist in difficult living conditions. Space and time are as sparsely measured out as the hours left in a prisoner's life. Chapter Thirty-One includes an impromptu visit from an architect who regrets that the narrator will not be alive to witness improvements soon to be made to the prison. The architect's visit serves as an example of irony, not only for his cruel remark about the narrator's imminent death, but also for the fact that it is highly doubtful any "improvements" made to the prison will make prisoners' lives easier.

While indicating that the prison is constantly working to refine its organizational systems, the architect's remarks reinforce the dehumanization of each prisoner. The narrator has no individual identity within the prison. He is just another number, a fact that he often observes. In Chapter Eight, when he compares his knowledge of the incarceration process to how long he has been imprisoned, trying to guess when he will die, he makes a comment about being just a number in the system: "Là, classement, numérotage, enregistrement: car la guillotine est encombrée, et chacun ne doit passer qu'à son tour" (288). In Chapter Thirty, he repeats this idea in his criticism of the prison confessor, who lacks the empathy that would make the last moments bearable and only sees the narrator as another unit in the number of condemned prisoners: "Mais ce bon vieillard, qu'est-il pour moi? que suis-je pour lui? un individu de l'espèce malheureuse,



une ombre comme il en a déjà tant vu, *une unité à ajouter au chiffre des exécutions*” (340; my emphasis). Hugo, significantly, accentuates the idea of people as mathematical “units,” just as he typographically highlights the word “order” in italics in Chapter Twenty-Four: “à un signe du capitaine, je vis les coups de bâton pleuvoir au hasard sur les charrettes, sur les épaules ou sur les têtes, et toute rentra dans cette espèce de calme extérieur qu’on appelle *l’ordre*” (306).<sup>87</sup> The lexical field of rational logic and order becomes negative in a world where such calm objectivity leads to impassiveness before death.

One way that the narrator escapes his cell is through his ability to hear others outside the prison, or outside of the carriage as he is transported to his death. In this respect, young girls hold a unique place in *Le Dernier Jour*, as they will in all the texts under study. In addition to the role played by the narrator’s daughter, whom he addresses at times in the diary, we find other anonymous girls that figure prominently in the text. While traveling between penitentiaries, the narrator is horrified to hear a young girl joyfully pronounce the amount of time left until his death sentence is carried out. In a later scene, another anonymous young girl of fifteen passes by the prisoner’s window while he is briefly in the infirmary. Hoping that she is a “petit oiseau” sent by God to relieve him of his despair, the narrator likens her to the image of a “une limace sur une rose” (311), her slang betraying a lack of innocence. Kathryn M. Grossman comments on the girl’s song as a pairing of the sublime and the grotesque (see 141).<sup>88</sup>

The episode that most succinctly relays the temporal and spatial ideologies of the state is in Chapter Fourteen, where the narrator views the procession of convicts being prepared to make their way to galley ships: “Une fois rivé à cette chaîne, on n’est plus qu’une *fraction* de ce tout hideux qu’on appelle le cordon, et qui se meut comme un seul homme. L’intelligence doit

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<sup>87</sup> The way in which Hugo emphasizes the negative aspects of order in terms of numbers anticipates the horror that would be the way scientific efficiency was applied to killing human beings during World War II. Georges Perec, in *W, ou le souvenir de l’enfance* (1975), goes even further than *Le Dernier Jour* in linking mathematical rationality to human evil.

<sup>88</sup> Massin argues that this slangy song anticipates the character of Éponine in *Les Misérables* (see 678).

abdiquer, le carcan du bagne le condamne à mort; et quant à *l'animal* lui-même, il ne doit plus avoir de besoins et d'appétits qu'*à heures fixes*" (305; my emphasis). Dehumanization is accomplished by identifying the chained convicts with animals and lifeless machines.<sup>89</sup> In Grossman's analysis of this scene, which she judges as one of the two pivotal episodes that form the prisoner's feelings toward his current comrades, she views this "metonymical relation of each to the whole" as linking the narrator to the chain gang's destiny. I would add that the metonymy functions in terms of the lexical field of numbers as measurement. These two sentences directly link the idea of prisoners as units of measurement to the spatio-temporal ideology of the prison, where the state controls the hours of basic human functions. In this way, if the measure makes the man, it can also unmake his humanity. In the following section, I demonstrate how Hugo draws on temporality and spatiality in a variety of ways to communicate the state's lack of empathy towards condemned prisoners as well as the narrator's emotional distress as his end draws near. First, I discuss Hugo's conscious choice to make his narrator anonymous as well as to provide limited biographical background, thus limiting the latter's diary entries to the present sensorial experiences—the sounds of the prison, his interactions with prison workers and other inmates, as well as his other senses. In particular, I highlight Hugo's focus on the passing of time in increasing detail and how he uses temporal markers in an innovative way to communicate desperation on the part of the narrator. I demonstrate that sound is linked to time in the form of church bells, an important element throughout the novel that I explore in detail.

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<sup>89</sup> Hugo repeatedly compares the narrator's fellow inmates to animals and machines, a pairing that has been made since at least Descartes. The narrator compares his incarcerated assimilation to a dehumanizing process as well: "J'étais devenu machine comme la voiture" (320)—also noted by Grossman (see 133). The narrator also compares himself to a machine during his trial when the jailors handcuff him: "c'était une machine sur une machine" (276).

### The Measure Unmakes the Man

By refusing to explain the crime of the condemned man, Hugo not only endows his work with a more universal appeal, but also insists on the limited temporal frame of the narrative. We never learn the narrator's name or much of his history, except that he is from the upper classes, and "not born to crime, poverty, or ignorance" (126).<sup>90</sup> Grossman argues that the anonymity helps the reader identify more with the narrator and his first-person perspective and likewise serves to better convey a global message: "Like his earlier historical novels, *Le Dernier Jour* reaches through both time and space to deliver a message intelligible to and valid for everybody" (118).<sup>91</sup> Lucien Dällenbach argues that personal information is irrelevant to the reader, given the prisoner's impending death. Moreover, Dällenbach views the narrator as having lost access to his identity for the same reason. The prisoner has been reduced to mere sensory perception: "il devient un *je* sans passé ni mémoire, sans moi ni personne—un être affolé réduit aux sensations qu'il endure" (78). Temporality, in the chiming of church bells, is one way that his sense of hearing conveys information, "la succession d'heures tenant lieu ici de la suite des jours" (Dällenbach 79). The passage of time is so precise in both narrative and discourse time—the latter which A. A. Mendilow calls the "pseudo-chronological duration of the theme of the novel" (71)—that the reader can easily write up a schedule of the condemned man's last twenty-four hours. For Grossman, the prisoner's precise notation of passing events is an attempt at recuperating "the space/time that constantly threatens to slip past unnoticed" (112). Slowing

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<sup>90</sup> Grossman points to narrators with similar class backgrounds in Hugo's previous novels: "Just as d'Auverney's [*Bug-Jargal*, 1826] conventional mentality eventually points the reader toward some unconventional conclusions, so does the condemned man's deviant exterior mask a nature quite compatible with the bourgeois norm" (126).

<sup>91</sup> For Rousset, the prisoner's anonymity is necessary in order to distinguish him from other prison convicts: "ce criminel sans crime devait rester distinct de ces truands pittoresques ou pitoyables qui apparaissent ici ou là pour faire le contraste: les forçats partant pour les galères ou le 'friauche' qui fait, lui, le récit de sa vie passée (XXIII); cette brève autobiographie d'un Valjean sans envergure ne comble pas la place laissée vide: le passé du protagoniste doit rester inconnu" (41).

down the clock proves impossible, but the narrator's attempts are worth analysis for additional reasons.

Other critics discount the idea of linearity. Allan Stoekl identifies the narrator's impending punishment as a continuation rather than an end.<sup>92</sup> The novel's *dénouement* infects the text from the beginning, reversing the essence of what a "beginning" is and eliminating the possibility of an ending (in both a verbal and substantive sense). In sum, Stoekl suggests that the novel is nonlinear, as does Victor Brombert, who likens the anticipated ending (the capital punishment of the narrator) to the narrator's use of the journal format, the "imprisonment in a futureless present" (28). This analogy can be likened to Stoekl's idea of the way in which the ending "contaminates" the present.

Another way to read *Le Dernier Jour* is as what I would call a "hyper-linear" novel. In the narration's obsessive use of temporal markers, particularly in the use of clock time, the author draws attention to the implicit linear structure of all narrative in the Aristotelian sense. That is to say, narrative consists of a beginning, middle, and an end. Hugo applies the classical "unités" of theater to the novel, restricting action, time and place, a choice that his contemporaries, including his editor, criticized. By focusing the entire tale on the narrator's looming execution, Hugo makes the reader keenly aware of the inevitably linear passing of time. Hugo calls attention to time as an undeniable forward-moving process through his manipulation of narration, the metaphoric references to time, and the novel's ambiguous "ending." As the story progresses, chapters become increasingly shorter and the narration includes more and more explicit references to measured units of time. As we approach the end, we find simultaneous narration, which Genette associates more with the Nouveau Roman for being objective, transparent, and concentrated on the action.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> "The end, in other words, rather than fulfilling and making complete that which comes before, *contaminates* everything" (Stoekl 44).

<sup>93</sup> Genette, in his study of story and discourse times, notes that a strategy such as that used by Hugo at the end of his novel sometimes results in what he likens to a "convergence finale," an effect that he

With his execution looming, the narrator's recounting of events ("le temps de la narration") approaches more and more closely the unfolding of events themselves ("le temps de l'histoire"), and the reader can easily imagine the narrator desperately scratching his last words out on paper within few feet of the guillotine. As Genette finds in Proust, there is a "raccourcissement progressif" (*Figures III* 236) between story time and discourse time, between *syuzhet* and *fabula*. To overlook the progressive braiding of these two times in the novel would be to overlook an aspect of this text's complexity.

Rousset alerts us to this temporal weaving in his argument for *Le Dernier Jour* as the first French diary-novel: "la fréquence [des indicateurs de simultanéité] s'accroît à mesure que le récit approche de son dénouement, rendent la rédaction contemporaine de l'événement" (41). Among the components Rousset lists for the diary genre incarnated in *Le Dernier Jour*, the temporal play—between the recent past, the present, and the near future—is fundamental, along with the first-person narrator and the lack of a "destinataire" (39-42). Rousset divides the text into two parts; the first eighteen chapters (a summation of the prisoner's time up until his journal entries that night) are retrospective, while the last twenty-one (which consider his last day up until the moment of his death) are increasingly rooted in the present: "ce qui s'écrit le dernier jour, d'heure en heure, renforce la part du présent proche et de la quasi-simultanéité, avec insertion de quelques analepses" (43). While Rousset gives several examples of how time is inscribed in *Le Dernier jour*, I believe that a more thorough examination of temporality is necessary and will provide us with a better understanding of the intricacy with which Hugo makes the present and the near-past approach each other. Rousset provides an important clue to the relationship in the text between space and time when he notes how the prisoner's experience of the outside world depends for a large part on auditory clues, particularly the chimes of the "horloge": "Entre le rire de la vie

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considers to be among "les plus saisissants," because they "jouent sur le fait que la durée même de l'histoire diminue progressivement la distance qui la sépare du moment de la narration" (232).

interdite et le dehors hostile des derniers instants s'inscrit tout le parcours raconté heure par heure, fragment par fragment, au son de l'horloge qui scande le temps et l'écriture du condamné" (49).<sup>94</sup> Rousset's use of the word "scander" (rather than "diviser," for example) suggests that the clock acts as a structural element both thematically and poetically. A more thorough and detailed study is necessary to reveal the varied complexity of how Hugo articulates the representation of time in *Le Dernier Jour*.

In the narrator's first entries, he informs the reader of recent past events, including his trial and incarceration. In the first chapter he is suddenly awakened by his night lamp and the vision of his awaited end. Next, he recounts his recent journey to the prison and his time up to the present (that night), elucidating how he has procured writing implements for the writing of his journal. In the eighth chapter, the narrator estimates how much time is left before he will be guillotined. We need to remember that at this point the narrator is unaware that it is his last day, even somewhat unsure of what day it is. He bases his reconstruction of time through his knowledge of the justice system. According to the narrator, a six-week time frame is necessary for a single individual to go through the established procedures of capital punishment. In Chapter Two, a young girl, seeing the condemned man pass by on his way to Bicêtre, had observed the same: "Bon, dit la plus jeune en battant des mains, ce sera dans six semaines!" (281). He infers that the past Thursday marks six weeks since his incarceration. He notes in Chapter Eleven that dawn has not yet arrived, so he occupies himself with reading the names of former detainees on his cell wall, another concrete textual presence in the novel. In Chapter Eighteen, the day breaks, though the narrator is as yet unaware that it is the last day: "Pendant que j'écrivais *tout ceci*, la lampe a pali, le jour est venu, l'horloge de la chapelle a sonné six heures" (313; my emphasis).

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<sup>94</sup> In addition to the clock, Rousset argues that the outside world succeeds in making its way into the prisoner's cell through sight—the sun's shadows, the wall of past prisoners' inscriptions, the infirmary window—as well as sound—the young girl's song, the sounds of the prison (see 44-49). These peeks at the outside world are only partial and ironic: "La logique de l'enfermement est rigide, elle ne se deserre que pour d'ironiques ricochets de lumière et quand une fenêtre, toujours barrée, s'entr'ouvre, c'est encore la prison ou l'échafaud qui s'offrent au regard obsédé" (46).

The words “tout ceci” indicate that everything written up to this point has been jotted down in one sitting, one of the first instances in the novel when the reader glimpses a *mise en abyme* of writing. Such a temporal marker anchors the reader within what constitutes one of the longer chapters. Other examples of temporality abound and constitute a complex narrative structure. The symmetry of the syntax in this passage (with the alignment of three forms of temporality) is worth examining further.

Hugo makes use of temporal accumulations at diverse points in *Le Dernier Jour*, each one emphasizing the linear passage of time in series showing smaller and smaller units of measurement.<sup>95</sup> For example, in the fourth sentence of the novel, the narrator explains his life before the conviction: “Chaque jour, chaque heure, chaque minute avait son idée” (273). In the next to last chapter, the series goes in reverse, from smaller to larger increments: “J’ai tremblé, comme si j’eusse pensé à autre chose depuis six heures, depuis six semaines, depuis six mois” (364). This chiasmus signals the eternal death to which the narrator is condemned. Similarly, in the passage noted above, the dimming of the narrator’s lamp is a metaphor for the waning life of the condemned man who worriedly watches it, as well as a classical sign of mortality found in baroque vanities. Daybreak, too, is a natural sign of temporality.<sup>96</sup> Finally, the chapel bell rings six o’clock, a reference to public time, much as the execution will be a public affair. Church bells and temporality, coupled with state power, are closely connected throughout the novel.

As these examples show, the narrator’s sense of passing time is rather imprecise in the first half of the novel. Five sentences after noting the time as six o’clock, however, he learns that his death is imminent, “pour aujourd’hui” (313). The meaning of “today” swiftly changes,

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<sup>95</sup> In one of the possible sources for *Le Dernier Jour*, André Chénier’s “La Jeune Captive” (1794), the speaker transposes the cries of a young noblewoman sentenced to be guillotined in a similarly decreasing measurement of time in the sixth stanza: “Je ne suis qu’au printemps, je veux voir la moisson; / Et comme le soleil, de-saison en saison, / Je veux achever mon année. / Brillante sur ma tige et l’honneur du jardin, / Je n’ai vu luire encor que les feux du matin; / Je veux achever ma journée” (my emphasis).

<sup>96</sup> We can contrast this to the insomnia of the condemned narrator in Camus’s *L’Etranger*. An insomniac, Meurseault waits for two things each night—dawn or a possible prison release: “C’est à l’aube qu’ils venaient, je le savais. En somme, j’ai occupé mes nuits à attendre cette aube” (113).

suddenly connoting a more precise and immediate present, since it will be the last “today” ever lived by the narrator.<sup>97</sup> From this point on, the past tense is gradually replaced by the present tense. In Chapter Nineteen, the exclamatory phrase, “C’est pour aujourd’hui!” is repeated, once at the beginning of the chapter and again at the end, framing the chapter. In the same way, the first sentence of the novel signals the overarching death sentence (“Condamné à mort!”), which frames the entire novel.<sup>98</sup> Such recurrences echo the bell’s quickening toll as heard by the narrator and constitute a complex poetic structure. The fact that the narrator comments a number of times on an actual bell chiming points to Hugo’s awareness—and apt use—of the poetic power of repetition.

After this point in the story, we notice a more frenetic pace set in. In the last entries, story and discourse time meld together until they are one. Not only is the narrator now aware that he will be executed that same day, but the structure of the novel abruptly changes. Chapters become much shorter, highlighting the desperation of a condemned man in his last hours. Likewise, the use of the present tense assumes a new significance, the here and now suddenly becoming all the more real because the narrator is still alive, and can still conjugate himself in his journal. Suddenly, phrases such as “je suis” take on a new, more temporary meaning, as well as a more personal one.

Surprised when the clock unexpectedly chimes six o’clock, the narrator swiftly realizes that the bells are tolling for him; rather than a habitual mark of public time, the chiming hour refers to his imminent execution. In the pages that follow, the narrator increasingly inserts the exact hour into his descriptions. During his transcribed conversations with the bailiff and another

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<sup>97</sup> In speaking of intercalated narration, Genette specifies that temporal signifiers change their meaning in relation to the narrative instance. He uses the word “today” from Proust’s *Le Temps Retrouvé* (1927) as an example, but we can find this same example in Hugo’s text. In Proust, “today” signifies “after the war,” while in Hugo, “today” changes from one journal entry to the next, first connoting the present time, then, signifying the last day of the condemned man’s life.

<sup>98</sup> The last sentence (“QUATRE HEURES”) points with temporal precision to the time of death, or at least near to it.



convict, as well as the account of his transfer from Bicêtre to the Conciergerie (Chapter Twenty-two), clock time is used more and more often. In addition, the narrator describes his transfer to the Conciergerie more precisely than his initial imprisonment in Bicêtre. The narrator notes at the beginning of Chapter Twenty-two that the “huissier” arrives at seven-thirty, and the end finds us at eight-thirty. In that brief hour, the narrator makes numerous metaphoric references to time, feeling that each passing hour ages him a year. He notes that “à l’heure qu’il est,” another condemned man is in court awaiting his turn to be taken to the same cell, and through the same “voyage.” The narrator actually encounters his replacement, and this “friauche” trades him vests (hoping to sell the new vest in order to have enough tobacco for the six weeks left him) before the narrator is led to another room, “à la chambre où les condamnés attendent l’heure” (331). In Chapter Twenty-six, the narrator notes that he has six more hours left to wait, though he cannot yet accustom himself to his death, and never will, asking progressively for smaller and smaller portions of time, commensurable with the time left to him— first hours, then minutes, then seconds.

By the last few chapters, the extreme anxiety of feeling one’s last few hours pass leads the narrator to feel a kind of temporal desperation. In Chapter Thirty-Four, he loses his sense of what time it is, just as he begins to lose his sense of self: “Une heure vient de sonner. Je ne sais laquelle. j[sic]’entends mal le marteau de l’horloge. Il me semble que j’ai un bruit d’orgues dans mes oreilles; ce sont mes dernières pensées qui bourdonnent” (347). In Chapter Thirty-Six, the narrator likens the ringing in his head to another memory—visiting Notre-Dame’s bell tower as a child. He details the extreme noise of the bell’s oscillating rings, “ce formidable tintement dans les oreilles” (349), loud enough to knock him over. As a small child he observed the power of the tolling bell, but now he experiences the tolling bells as if he is inside the tower itself: “Eh bien! il me semble que je suis encore dans la tour du [bourdon]. C’est tout ensemble un étourdissement et un éblouissement” (349). His overwhelming feelings of doom take the form of auditory distress.

In the same way that Charles Baudelaire compares his head to a prison room in the poem “Spleen,” Hugo likens his brain to a bell tower: “Il y a comme un bruit de cloche qui ébranle les cavités de mon cerveau; et autour de moi je n’aperçois plus cette vie plane et tranquille que j’ai quittée, et où les autres hommes cheminent encore, que de loin et à travers les crevasses d’un abîme” (349). Not only is the narrator separated from the outside world (and his former life) by walls, but also by the distress he suffers at the thought of his impending death. As Grossman asserts, “His head has become a resounding bell where no harmonies reside” (134). Hugo relays the narrator’s profound disarray through his sense of hearing, beginning with a childhood experience that linked the bell and corporal punishment, and ending in his own imprisonment and political execution.

In addition to this example of time slowing down to the point of infinity in the bell’s distorted ringing, the last ten chapters count down the time with more measured precision. Chapter Thirty-Seven begins with an exact sense of the hour: “Il est une heure et quart” (350). In Chapter Thirty-Eight, the narrator knows approximately how much time is left him: “Encore deux heures et quarante-cinq minutes, et je serai guéri” (351). In Chapter Thirty-Seven (quite short, like Thirty-Five, Thirty-Eight, and Forty-Four through Forty-Seven), the narrator mentions the clock face (“le cadran”) on the city hall as being a sinister aspect of the architecture:

Avec son toit aigu et roide, son clocheton bizarre, son grand cadran blanc, ses étages à petites colonnes, ses mille croisées, ses escaliers usés par les pas, ses deux arches à droite et à gauche, il est là, de plain-pied avec la Grève; sombre, lugubre, la face toute rongée de vieillesse, et si noir, qu’il est noir au soleil.

Les jours d’exécution, il vomit des gendarmes de toutes ses portes, et regarde le condamné avec toutes ses fenêtres.

Et le soir, son cadran, qui a marqué l'heure, reste lumineux sur sa façade  
ténébreuse. (351)<sup>99</sup>

The personification of the city hall here is fascinating, the description clearly identifying the state's apparatus of control with time (the clock face as part of the edifice) and space (the building split into parts, the gendarmes dehumanized). This very negative portrayal of time, insofar as it is part of the state institution, reveals Hugo's use of temporality to illustrate how the state manages its citizens' time. Through the example of a condemned man's last day, Hugo emphasizes the most extreme form of state-regulated time. To be imprisoned is to lose an accounting of one's time, since all personal effects such as pocket watches (if the narrator possessed one) would be taken away. A prisoner cannot, in sum, plan his own time, but must submit to the temporal regime of the state.

Brombert notes that in *Le Dernier Jour*, “[f]ictional technique and temporal perspective work hand in hand” (29). Rather than go into more detail, Brombert speaks of the more metaphorical aspects of time in the novel. However, he makes an apt and useful analogy between the narrator's racing thoughts and running out of time, comparing him to “Shakespeare's Richard II, whose thoughts have become the minutes of time running out” (26).<sup>100</sup> In Chapter Fifteen,

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<sup>99</sup> In Chapter Forty-One, we find a similar reference to the clock face with the same function. The narrator wonders if the guillotined prisoners meet at night there where they were executed: “L'hôtel de ville sera là, avec sa façade vermoulue, son toit déchiqueté, et son cadran qui aura été sans pitié pour tous” (354).

<sup>100</sup> The passage from *Richard II* (1595) is worth citing:

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me,  
For now hath time made me his numb'ring clock.  
My thoughts are minutes, and with sights they jar  
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch  
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,  
Is pointing still in cleansing them from tears.  
Now, sir, the sounds that tell what hour it is  
Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart,  
Which is the bell. So sighs, and ears, and groans  
Show minutes, hours, and time (V, 5, 49-58)

Hugo championed the dissemination of Shakespeare in France by incorporating many of the features of Shakespearian drama into romantic theater, most notably mixing the comic and the tragic. Brombert's

when the narrator realizes that there is no more reprieve, that he will soon die, he joins this idea to the impossibility of escaping the linear track toward the guillotine:

Plus de chance maintenant ! mon pourvoi sera rejeté, parce que tout est en règle; les témoins ont bien témoigné, les plaideurs ont bien plaidé, les juges ont bien jugé. Je n'y compte pas, à moins que... Non, folie! plus d'espérance ! Le pourvoi, c'est une corde qui vous tient suspendu au-dessus de l'abîme, et qu'on entend craquer à chaque instant, jusqu'à ce qu'elle se casse. C'est comme si le couteau de la guillotine mettait six semaines à tomber. (308)

Note the over-simplicity of Hugo's prose. By using the same form of noun and verb (e.g. *juges, jugés*) and repeating the same syntax, Hugo underlines the banality of the death machine in the state judicial institutions. The narrator is using language that comments on the nature of unfolding events. Then, the last sentence in the paragraph demonstrates the painful nature of the death sentence by drawing out the supposed painless slicing to six weeks of agony.<sup>101</sup> Nowhere is this seen in more brutal fashion than Hugo's narration of the final remaining hours of a condemned criminal's life. For the narrator, the only solace left is the act of writing in his journal, a possible way of mediating his approaching end, even a form of escape.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the journal

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analogy therefore has the merit not only of illustrating the importance of time in *Le Dernier Jour*, but also of suggesting Shakespeare's influence.

<sup>101</sup> Chapter Thirty-Nine questions the fact that the guillotine is lauded for its "painless" approach to execution. The narrator wonders if the decapitated head does not feel pain, even for an instant: "Et puis, on ne souffre pas, en sont-ils sûrs? Qui le leur a dit? Conte-t-on que jamais une tête coupée se soit dressée sanglante au bord du panier, et qu'elle ait crié au peuple: Cela ne fait pas de mal!" (351). The ironic tone of this last sentence echoes the sarcasm that the narrator levels at various jail workers. He taunts one jailor with a riddle, and at the end of the novel, when he is not allowed a mattress, he wonders if it is thought that he will strangle himself with it. These few instances of humor provide much-needed reprieve from the relentless dark themes of the novel. Moreover, such a mixing of humor with tragedy is another way that Hugo applies romantic dramatic conventions to the novel.

<sup>102</sup> We find this same propensity to imagine a condemned man's last hours in one of Hugo's letters (1842) about his travels to a castle in Spain. Written years after the publication of *Le Dernier Jour*, the letter recalls the novel in many ways. In a room for prisoners, Hugo notices a date inscribed on the wall and wonders if one the man's name beside it, Jose Gutierrez, belongs to a prisoner or a victor, and if it is the former, whether he had time to write the memoir of his life in his remaining hours: "1643. C'est la date de la bataille de Rocroy. Jose Gutierrez était-il un des vaincus de cette bataille ? Y avait-il été pris ? L'avait-on

could outlive him. In the following section, I explore the link between writing and death in *Le Dernier Jour*. Hugo focuses on mortality in many ways, including the narrator's musings about his journal's own future. Using the narrator's own qualification of his story (as noted in the journal) as "dépareillé," I concentrate on how references to material textuality in the novel—whether to the journal itself or other forms of writing—allow Hugo to question the purpose of literature at the same time that he suggests new methods for composition.

### Écrire pour dépareiller

The narrator of *Le Dernier Jour* takes into account the possibility of his journal surviving him, envisioning the pages soaked by rain and blown against windowpanes. Likewise, when Hugo suggests in his initial 1829 preface that *Le Dernier Jour* was a real document, he compares the text to "une liasse de papiers jaunes et inégaux sur lesquels on a trouvé, enregistrés une à une, les dernières pensées d'un misérable" (253).<sup>103</sup> And again, midway through the novel, we find an almost identical description of papers, when the narrator recounts his voyage from the prison to the Conciergerie. Looking outside the carriage, he thinks that he sees a man or a woman, sometimes both, holding "une liasse de feuilles imprimées que les passants se disputaient, en ouvrant la bouche comme pour un grand cri" (324-25). The condemned man's lack of certitude resembles the author's ambiguity about the nature of his work, both the preface and the novel presenting a very visual image of the text that underscores its materiality. However, while the two descriptions provide a detailed physical representation of a textual object, each insists at the same

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enfermé là ? Lui avait-on laissé le loisir d'écrire dans son cachot ce mélancolique résumé de sa vie et de toute vie humaine?" (*Le Rhin* 50).

<sup>103</sup> Hugo accentuates the real-time effect provided by an intimate journal through the quick staccato of the text's forty-nine succinct chapters. Realistic effects, such as the use of the present tense and demonstrative adjectives, give an additional "effet de réel."

time on its possible nonexistence. Though it physically exists in both cases, its interpretation is fluid.

Writing as a way of leaving one's mark after death is a persistent theme in literature. The anticipation of one's own death is a subject of meditation for writers in work and in life, such as William Butler Yeats's writing of his own gravestone inscription before his death ("Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!"). Brooks considers *Le Dernier Jour* an impossible obituary: "Hugo's condemned man is about to become his own obituary but cannot quite. The necessary incompleteness of the narrative destroys the obituary form" (540). Brombert suggests that the novel may be an imagined obituary for André Chénier (1762-94). The poet, famously guillotined during the Revolution (and whose work was only first published in 1819), criticized his punishment and the Terror in one of his final poems (though he sympathized with the revolutionary movement prior to the Terror).<sup>104</sup> According to Brombert, "Chénier's poem ["Comme un rayon"], written in jail as the last message from a condemned man, is thus the overt intertext for Hugo's own poem ["André"] glorifying the writer's vocation as victim" (42). The first stanza of Chénier's poem certainly supports Brombert's view, but also suggests Chénier inspired Hugo's insistence on tying temporality to writing:

Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zéphyr  
 Anime la fin d'un beau jour, [...]  
 Au pied de l'échafaud j'essaye encor ma lyre.  
 Peut-être est-ce bientôt mon tour;  
 Avant que de ses deux moitiés  
 Ce vers que je commence ait atteint la dernière,  
 Peut-être en ces murs effrayés

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<sup>104</sup> Suzanne Guerlac discusses how Hugo spoke to Chénier's spirit during séances at Jersey, as chronicled in Gustave Simon's edition (74).

Le messenger de mort, noir recruteur des ombres,  
 Escorté d'infâmes soldats,  
 Remplira de mon nom ces longs corridors sombres.

Like Hugo's narrator in *Le Dernier jour*, the poetic voice in Chénier's poem locates himself in space: at the foot of the scaffold, still narrating his life even as death approaches. The poem's reference to its own structure—the fact that the poet may not finish writing the poem—is likewise similar to *Le Dernier Jour*'s preoccupation with writing and the narrator's concern with getting his last few moments down on paper.

The concentration of references to writing in *Le Dernier Jour* suggests that Hugo was concerned with similar considerations, such as the value of writing and its form. For Grossman, the journal functions as a way for the prisoner to prevent becoming like those around him, reflecting “his will to not be reified either by himself or by society at large” (136). Writing becomes a saving grace, as it will for a domestic servant in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (discussed in Chapter Five of the present dissertation).<sup>105</sup> Hugo often makes sense of life's most compelling questions through textual metaphors. We have but to think of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, where he takes up the topic of (medieval) capital punishment (Esmeralda's torture) and the question of literacy prompted by the printing press's replacement of the medieval cathedral (“Ceci tuera cela”). In *Le Dernier Jour*, beyond questioning the journal's survival, the narrator likewise makes reference to the incompleteness of this document. He frames his story in terms of

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<sup>105</sup> Writing holds a place of importance both to the plot and as a saving grace in all of the texts considered in my study, whether it be personal journals (Hugo, Mirbeau) or written letters (Maupassant, Zola). Writing can be healing (Hugo, Maupassant), but also a damning proof of criminal complicity (Mirbeau, Zola). Keeping a journal helps, or at least slows down, Hugo's convict from becoming a part of the nameless mass: “Writing a journal therefore becomes a means to resist his own moral erosion through constructive activity, by reaching an audience that might some day be moved to pity—and reform—by such intense agony as his [...]. Here also can others learn to recognize the man beneath the culprit, to differentiate between his essential, fragile self and the ever-hardening mask of the criminal he has had to put on” (Grossman 152). As we shall see, Mirbeau's narrator accomplishes much the same in her written account of the horrors of domestic servitude. While other servants find alternate methods for striking back against inequalities, Célestine's journal helps her to process (and relay to readers) injustices done to her as well as a cathartic means of keeping her own sanity.

a possible future reader: “Si on lit un jour mon histoire, après tant d’années d’innocences et de bonheur, on ne voudra pas croire à cette année exécration, qui s’ouvre par un crime et se clôt par un supplice; elle aura l’air dépareillée” (347-48). The narrator views his story as hard to believe for the sheer number of horrific events that are packed into one year. However, I would underline the word choice of “dépareillée.” This adjective can suggest incompleteness in more than one sense, also connoting the lack of a similar half, as in a pair, or more appropriately for *Le Dernier Jour*, half of one’s body through decapitation. Another more positive definition could be “uniqueness,” and this last choice is preferable for the purposes of this study because it alludes to the experimental nature of Hugo’s writing.

The link between writing and mortality is made most clearly in one of the novel’s final dream sequences, as Anne Ubersfeld has shown. In Chapter Forty-Two, the condemned man dreams of an old woman coming out of a closet and biting his hand: “j’ai senti trois dents aiguës s’imprimer sur ma main, dans les ténèbres” (357). Critics have analyzed this scene, and rightly interpreted the female figure as a metaphorical representation of the guillotine (known as “la veuve” in slang) and of death itself. I would add that the narrator suggests a similar comparison in Chapter Twenty when he likens the executioner to the embodiment of the prison. Ubersfeld examines this dream in detail, speaking of the recurrence of the old woman figure, whom she calls “Mère-la-Morte,” in other texts. When the old woman bites the narrator, this signifies for Ubersfeld an attack on the narrator’s virility and identity, since she sees in the dream sequence a link to Hugo’s knowledge of his own possible illegitimacy. Biographical links aside, I argue that more attention should be paid to the fact that the vampiric figure bites the narrator’s hand rather than his neck. The cutting off of the hand serves as an alternate punishment for parricide—one of the possible reasons for the narrator’s punishment (see Gohin)—and also disables the physical act of writing. Notably, the narrator uses the verb “s’imprimer” (to imprint, both in the sense of text and bites), explicitly suggesting this connection. Writing becomes a way for the narrator to



witness himself, and he stubbornly holds onto his pen until literally the last possible moment, though he must anticipate his own conclusion with prolepsis. Judging from the rigor of the penal bureaucratic schedule that he so assiduously describes, death would likely take place on the hour, in this case four o'clock.<sup>106</sup> By putting this time in capital letters ("QUATRE HEURES"), Hugo makes a parallel with another conventional way of signaling a conclusion—THE END (LA FIN). QUATRE HEURES is thus implicitly linked to these words and offers a more precise detailing of what and when that end would be. Brombert observes, in his discussion of the "visionary" aspect of Hugo's writing, that "the process of writing, as thematized in Hugo's novels, remains forever incomplete, caught in the progressions and regressions of becoming" (241). Likewise, the narrator notes that future readers will find the coupling of a restricted temporal frame, both that of narrative and discourse time, to give the text an "air dépareillé" (348) but this very feeling of incompleteness stemming from such innovative uses of time is what gives the text its richness and complexity, a complexity constructed by borrowing from travel writing's conventions.

Just as the meaning of the final two words (QUATRE HEURES) cannot be fixed, and cannot thus "end," death sentences in general (in the form of capital punishment) do not adhere to the finality they suggest, or at least this is the argument that Hugo makes. What is the meaning of this final time chosen for the last phrase, the last cry? Does it indicate the time at which the narrator is writing, or is he anticipating the time at which he will die? The former explanation would underscore the way in which the narrator might cling to writing as a last refuge of subjectivity, a last delay before the impending textual and physical "coupure." As Grossman explains, "As long as he writes he will, first literally, then figuratively, live" (152). The latter reading would be a prolepsis, going into the future. However one interprets the phrase, its

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<sup>106</sup> In the last chapter, the executioner complains that no delays will be tolerated, as this could lead to the equipment rusting: "Cet exécrationnel bourreau! Il s'est approché du juge pour lui dire que l'exécution devait être faite à une certaine heure, que cette heure approchait, qu'il était responsable, que d'ailleurs il pleut, et que cela risque de se rouiller" (371). I would also call attention to the number of clauses in this sentence, unusual in the text, but whose repetition, besides conveying orality, mimics the work of the executioner.

ambiguity does not detract from its force. I agree with Stoekl that Hugo's novel proposes the impossibility of neatly ending either a literary narrative or a human life. These two are linked by an end that remains out of reach. As a man condemned to death, the narrator cannot, in theory, narrate his own death, and thus any autobiographical account will never reach the actual moment of death. While Stoekl sees this *dénouement* as an “endless ending,” I posit that the last chapter, and the last few words, reflects the idea that we cannot actually write our end, leaving only prolepsis possible. Hugo denaturalizes narrative structure, and he does this in a purposeful and self-conscious fashion that we can better understand by closely analyzing references made to the writing process itself.

As we have seen, in the first chapter of *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, de Maistre's narrator speaks of “la nouvelle manière de voyager que j'ai introduit dans le monde” (5). Rather than a new way of traveling, Hugo has perhaps introduced a new way of writing into the world, one that would become widespread in the next century in writers from James Joyce to André Malraux. Even within the nineteenth century, as my study suggests, Hugo displays experimental innovation in the novel that anticipates devices exploited by naturalism. Ironically, realists and naturalists alike do not acknowledge such an inheritance.<sup>107</sup> Whether admitted or not, these associations clearly exist at the level of narrative structure and form. Mitterand declares that “le naturalisme de Zola est aussi un formalisme” (*Écrits sur le roman* 26). After looking more closely at *Le Dernier Jour*, we can say that scientific naturalism, among other genres, is a formal influence on Hugo and Zola alike.<sup>108</sup>

In *Time and the Novel* (1952), Mendilow speaks of the “time obsession” of the twentieth century, but we can see the inklings of such an obsession much earlier. Industrialization produced

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<sup>107</sup> “The Realist aesthetic, for example, has long dismissed Hugo's imaginative writing style, with criticisms from Zola among others tainting reception of Hugo's novels well into the twentieth century” (Stephens 69).

<sup>108</sup> In his essay, “De la description,” Zola abhors the comparison of a writer to a painter, instead to comparing himself to a zoologist, citing the same need for both naturalists and zoologists to study, to analyze, and to situate their subjects within time and space (*Écrits sur le roman* 274).

wide changes, including the rationalization of domestic and public matters, evident in the increased use of clock time in narratives. Clock time so dominates the narration in the first chapter of Zola's *La Bête humaine*, as I show in my next chapter, as to suggest a minute-by-minute account of time passing. Stephens insists that "Hugo's place in literary and cultural history would be well served by identifying his relationship to his contemporaries both within and outside France" (74). Thus, establishing links to poets like Chénier and writers like de Maistre, as well as unobserved similarities to realism and naturalism, helps to go beyond the myth of Hugo and assign deeper meanings to his writing.

Mitterrand compares Zola's use of space to Balzac's, and his remarks can also be used to compare Zola's and Hugo's use of spatio-temporal structures. For Mitterrand, "Zola isole plus que son grand devancier le champ d'exercice de ses personnages" (207). Mitterrand also states that Zola's "mise en œuvre de la spatialité relève d'une technologie narrative plus élaborée, moins aléatoire que chez ses devanciers, tout en laissant place à d'heureuses dérives poétiques" (213). Note Mitterrand's use of the plural ("ses devanciers"), a category to which we can easily add Hugo. Taking up the gauntlet proposed by Stephens, we should work to study the experimental innovations as yet unacknowledged in Hugo's creative writing. Just as *Le Dernier Jour* remains incomplete, so does the critical place afforded to this novel within the vast shadow cast by Hugo's myth.

### Chapter 3

#### **Murders on (and around) the French Express: *La Bête humaine***

According to Alain Pagès, *La Bête humaine* became the third most read volume of the *Rougon-Macquart* series after the 1950s, following *Germinal* and *L'Assommoir* (146). Since that time, *La Bête humaine* has produced a rich and varied amount of criticism, chiefly because—unlike other novels from the *Rougon-Macquart*—it blends several themes into one: trains, crime, and the justice system. Each of these subjects could have given rise to a separate work, as Susan Blood notes. Combining all three allowed Zola to complete his projected series more quickly, and the rail system served as the perfect backdrop for crimes and injustice.<sup>109</sup> By beginning with a train murder, Zola could include a judicial investigation (highlighting state corruption) and lay out a host of other crimes, all closely tied to the national rail network. Every character is connected to the trains and as a result to the judiciary through crime. Because the victim, Grandmorin, was director of the Western Railway Company, the investigation of his death

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<sup>109</sup> “Trains entered the popular imagination as ideal scenes of crime, particularly since first-class compartments were so isolated, and, as happened with Poinot, any cries or gunshot would be muffled by the deafening sounds of the moving vehicle” (Blood 53-54). The national train system was political and spatial in its inception: “En choisissant pour la France un réseau en étoile centré sur Paris, les hommes de la Monarchie de Juillet ont pris une décision dont les effets politiques, aussi bien qu'économiques, n'ont pas cessé de se faire sentir” (Baroli 12). Zola could not have chosen better, therefore, than to pair the rail system with a political critique, because the two were already inherently linked. Moreover, Zola's initial vision of the novel—a chapter for each rail line emanating from Paris—echoes the spatial politics of the French railway. For Zola, the political was particularly personal since his father had been cheated out of participating in the creation of a major rail line in Austria (Brown, *Zola: A Life* 6-8). Today with the TGV, the ties between development and the state continue: “Le développement territorial français qui est d'abord le fait d'ingénieurs au service de l'État s'appuie sur des grands corps valorisant le pouvoir de la technique et des chiffres” (Mongin 10).

becomes a political matter of national importance.<sup>110</sup> The novel begins with Grandmorin's murder (Chapter One) and continues with the investigation (Chapter Four), led by Judge Denizet in coordination with Camy-Lamotte, Secrétaire général du Ministère de la Justice, which results in the case being thrown out of court (a "non-lieu"). The ensuing murder of Grandmorin's adopted child Séverine reopens Grandmorin's case for a trial that sends the wrong men (Roubaud and Cabuche) to jail for life (Chapter Twelve). The remaining chapters consider the relationships between a host of characters with ties to Grandmorin and the rail system in general.<sup>111</sup> The novel ends with the train system being reorganized to transport soldiers to the front at the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war, signaling the end of the Second Empire.

In the last decade, a number of important articles and monographs have looked at *La Bête humaine*, whether in terms of crime fiction (Becker, Bell, Sándor Kalai, Nicholas Ruddick), transportation (Wojciech Tomasik, Hamon, Nelson, Duffy), time (Yvonne Barges Rollins, Robert M. Viti), adaptations (Blood, Monica Filimon, Robert Singer), atavism (Counter, Duffy, Lisa Downing, Olivier Got), gender (Susan Harrow), or space (Michael Lastinger, Olivier Lumbroso, or Nelson).<sup>112</sup> Some areas of criticism remain underrepresented, including poetics. As Baguley observes in his study of Zolian criticism, "stylistic analysis remains a largely neglected

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<sup>110</sup> Various political entities manipulate Grandmorin's death to their own ends. For those on the left, this "affaire" leads to a critique of the Empire, especially given the upcoming general elections: "Et l'affaire Grandmorin arrivait à point pour continuer l'agitation, les histoires les plus extraordinaires circulaient, les journaux s'emplissaient chaque matin de nouvelles hypothèses, injurieuses pour le gouvernement" (131).

<sup>111</sup> Most of the novel's characters have benefited from Grandmorin in some way, either receiving promotions or jobs as a reward for loyalty and service to him, sexual or other. Characters with any relation to Grandmorin do not meet a happy end, and this does not seem a coincidence—Séverine (murdered by her lover, Jacques Lantier, the novel's protagonist), Roubaud (sent to prison for life for having killed his wife, though he actually killed Grandmorin), Cabuche (also sentenced for life for Séverine's murder, but innocent of this, as well as for Grandmorin's and Louise's deaths, both of which he was widely accused of), Aunt Phasie (poisoned by her husband, but given her job by Grandmorin), and Philomène (a previous servant to Grandmorin, leading to her employment in the Saint Lazare station and beaten regularly by her brother).

<sup>112</sup> The MLA database comes up with seventy-five articles and chapters on *La Bête humaine* since 1981, comparable with the number of studies in the same database for *Les Misérables*. Following their popularity with reading, *Germinal* has garnered one hundred eighty-eight articles (since 1924), and *L'Assommoir* has received one hundred twenty-eight (since 1934).

area of Zola studies” (317). Recent scholarship has begun to show that naturalist writers display a complex poetics, but much work remains to be done.

In the years since Baguley’s reputable literature review for Zola, “An *état présent* of Zola Studies (1986-2000),” scholars have continued to focus on space, gender, and cultural studies. Baguley mentions Chantal Bertrand-Jennings’ monograph on space in Zola, and since the publication of her work, Lombroso and Nelson have added to the critical conversation. Several recent works (Hamon, Nelson, Duffy) look at transportation. Gender studies have also exploded in the decade since Baguley’s article (Jann Matlock, Annelise Mauge, Anne-Marie Sohn), and scholarship treating Zola is no exception. There has been a notable increase in scholarly attention to the history of crime, including Ruddick and Schehr’s examinations of naturalism. Cultural critics of crime, like Kalifa, Stephen Kern, and Vigarello, often draw on Zola in their examples. Notable critics, many already cited by Baguley, have now contributed a corpus of interdisciplinary work illustrating the fact that Zola’s poetics reflect his changing times, including Colette Becker. More recent research from those such as Downing, Duffy, Counter, and Bell, has drawn new attention to the influence of the Italian criminologist Lombroso on Zola’s writing. I continue in this vein, focusing my attention on scenes and characters that have been neglected by this interdisciplinary effort.

While critics have focused their attention on the impact of criminological theory on *La Bête humaine*, they have concentrated exclusively on Jacques’s character. I work to fill this lacuna by showing how minor characters such as Grandmorin (a serial molester protected by his high position) and Louise (one of his victims) are used in important ways to create Zola’s opus on crime. Grandmorin’s abuse of Louise has received little critical attention, though this rape-murder permeates the novel, appearing in almost every chapter. Additionally, I examine a neglected train scene with Jacques, which further elucidates the centrality of space and time to Zola’s poetics. Finally, I argue that *La Bête humaine* illustrates how the spatial and temporal

disciplinary practices of incarceration that we saw in Hugo's *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* have, in fin-de-siècle France, been absorbed into everyday life.

### **Writing and Reading Violence Against Women in *La Bête humaine***

Few critics use the term "abuse" when discussing *La Bête humaine*, though this is one of the novel's most persistent themes. Domestic violence wreaks havoc on almost every household mentioned, from Roubaud's beating Séverine in the first chapter, to Sauvagnat beating his sister Philomène for her sexual dalliances. The novel echoes nineteenth-century reality, since historians tell us that female domestic violence was widespread in this period.<sup>113</sup> While suspected adultery was certainly not a rationale for beating one's wife, Perrot informs us that everyday violence was often doled out as punishment for not carrying out household duties correctly.

Domestic violence against women in *La Bête humaine* is likened to a kind of correction: "Des cris, des sanglots de femme qu'on corrige s'élevaient, pendant qu'une grosse voix d'homme grondait des injures" (206). Jacques and his coworker Pecqueux both hear Philomène's cries, but they refuse to involve themselves out of respect for the male hierarchy: "ça y est, il lui allonge sa raclée. Elle a beau avoir trente-deux ans, il lui donne le fouet comme à une petite fille, quand il la surprend... Ah ! tant pis, je ne m'en mêle pas: c'est son frère!" (206). The men (her lovers by the novel's end) both tolerate Philomène's abuse with an almost bemused reaction, as if nothing is more natural than for a man to beat his adult sister for breaching social conventions.

Characters also accept severe forms of violence, even death, as a viable outlet for jealousy in *La Bête humaine*. Roubaud nearly kills Séverine in the first chapter when he learns of her relationship with her adopted guardian, Grandmorin: "En trois ans, il ne lui avait pas donné

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<sup>113</sup> "Battre sa femme fait partie des prérogatives masculines. Les coups et mauvais traitements sont le motif avancé par 80 % des femmes demandant la séparation de corps." (Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée* 277).

une chiquenaude, et il la massacrait, aveugle, ivre, dans un emportement de brute” (68). The narration insinuates that violent behavior can erupt out of nowhere, if provoked, suggesting that Séverine is somehow at fault for Roubaud’s reaction. In trying to get Séverine to confess, Roubaud threatens to eviscerate her: “Avoue que tu as couché avec, nom de Dieu! ou je t’éventre!” (69). Roubaud’s warning to his wife that she will be disemboweled unless she concurs amounts to torture. In Chapter Six, Roubaud tells Jacques he would kill Séverine without much thought if she were to cheat on him: “C’est vrai, des gaillards qui tombent dans un ménage, avec l’air de croire que la femme va tout de suite se jeter à leur tête, et que le mari, très honoré, fermera les yeux! Moi, ça me fait bouillir le sang... Voyez-vous, dans un cas pareil, j’étranglerais ma femme, oh ! du coup !” (195). Many characters in the novel tacitly accept killing women as a “crime of passion.” Killing is equated to a form of possession.

As if beatings and murder were not enough, several female characters in *La Bête humaine* are subject to sexual abuse. We learn in the first chapter that Séverine’s adopted guardian molests her from at least the age of sixteen. Séverine confesses to Roubaud that the abuse began in “la chambre rouge” at Croix-de-Maufras. It is clear that Séverine wished to end all contact with Grandmorin prior to his death, because she tries to get out of meeting him and refuses to go to his house at Croix-de-Maufras. As Séverine describes her childhood abuse, Zola refers to the sounds of the trains outside the apartment, the train’s “sifflets” “pareils à des cris aigus de femmes qu’on violente” (77). This personification reinforces the violence of the scene, as Roubaud beats Séverine within an inch of her life, and undermines Roubaud’s depiction of Séverine’s relation with Grandmorin as consensual.

Grandmorin groomed Séverine for sexual abuse by singling her out for special treatment when she was a little girl, as noted in the first chapter. He also has a known predilection for young domestic servants: “Car, tu sais, le président, malgré son air glacé, on en chuchote de raides sur son compte. Il paraît que, du vivant même de sa femme, toutes les bonnes y passaient”



(65). Grandmorin, in his more sinister aspects, resembles Joseph (or Maupassant's Renardet) more than one of Celestine's bosses, none of which are described as especially violent.<sup>114</sup> Despite all of this evidence suggesting Grandmorin's true nature, no one believes the victims of his sexual abuse.

The Lachesnaye family (Grandmorin's close relations) accuses Séverine of "mauvais instincts, étant petite" (141). Critics mimic this language. For many, Grandmorin "seduced" Séverine (Belensky 67; see also Nelson 15). Blood takes a different approach on which I would like to build. In her chronological listing of the crimes in *La Bête humaine*, she begins with Grandmorin's abuse of Séverine as a child: "The first crime in the sequence, although it takes place outside the time of the novel, is a case of child abuse extending over many years" (52). The fact that this crime is situated anterior to the action is central to my argument. In contrast to Blood, I assert that Séverine's molestation is the most important crime in the novel. Blood admits as much: "Without Grandmorin's abuse of Séverine none of the major events of the novel could have taken place. On some level, this should be the central crime of *La Bête humaine*, the original crime that generates the others and enables them to be read against a political backdrop" (52). However, although she stresses these childhood attacks against Séverine, Blood still places Grandmorin's murder on the train as "a more likely candidate for the central crime of the novel" (53) and downplays beginning the novel with Séverine's molestation.<sup>115</sup> I consider Séverine to be the central figure around which Zola builds a locus of sexual crimes. So many of the characters in this novel have ties to each other, but Séverine connects the major crimes in the way that best fulfills one of the novel's aims, to criticize the Second Empire.

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<sup>114</sup> From the beginning, Zola describes Grandmorin as a brutal authoritarian: "Il l'avait l'abord rude, il faissait tout trembler autour de lui" (61). Roubaud tells Séverine that she always talked of Grandmorin as having frightened her: "tu m'as raconté vingt fois que, dans ton enfance, il te faisait une peur bleue" (63). Counter notes that Grandmorin was also said to be in charge of a girl's school (29). Zola could be suggesting that Grandmorin provided himself every opportunity to indulge his vices, but at the very least there is a certain irony in that fact.

<sup>115</sup> Blood views this aspect of the *incipit* as a way to initiate "events in the novel, but only in the form of reportage" (56).

One of the most direct critiques of the government occurs when a friend of Grandmorin, Camy-Lamotte, compromises the murder investigation in order to pursue the promise of a future sexual relationship with Séverine. In Chapter Five, when Séverine visits the justice minister Camy-Lamotte to ask for his protection, he finds her “séduisante,” and admits his jealousy to himself: “Et il songeait à son ami Grandmorin, saisi d’une jalouse admiration: comment diable ce gaillard-là, son aîné de dix ans, avait-il eu jusqu’à sa mort de créatures pareilles, lorsque lui devait renoncer déjà à ces joujoux, pour ne pas y perdre le reste de ses moelles?” (165). Camy-Lamotte’s admiration becomes even more disturbing when he cavalierly refers to Grandmorin’s sexual abuse of Louissette, saying that Grandmorin “l’avait mise dans un vilain état” (169). Camy-Lamotte continues Grandmorin’s legacy of exploitation, both political and sexual, by envisioning a way to sexually blackmail Séverine through a key piece of evidence—her note to Grandmorin asking him to meet her on the six-thirty train to Le Havre. Camy-Lamotte is in sole possession of this note, but makes no mention of it to the lead investigator, Denizet. Eventually, Camy-Lamotte burns the letter, and this makes Séverine a victim again, “since now the story of her abuse will never be told” (Blood 58). Camy-Lamotte’s projected exploitation of Séverine, coupled with his interference with true justice, displays the corruption of the government at the highest levels. I agree with Blood that “the abuse of Séverine reflects the Second Empire’s abuse of power in many respects” (53). In general, Camy-Lamotte betrays a lack of regard for justice: “Au fond, rien ne valait la fatigue d’être juste. Il veillait uniquement au décor du régime qu’il servait” (166). To this end, he asks Denizet to produce a “non-lieu,” (170) since everyone would prefer to keep Grandmorin’s unpunished sexual crimes a secret; they are embarrassing for the rail system and the government. Camy-Lamotte says that he knew Grandmorin “jusqu’à dans ses vices” (132). The text suggests that the professionalization of the judiciary has turned into just one more corrupt vocation. Rather than searching for the truth, characters like Camy-Lamotte and Denizet, paragons of this self-perpetuating system, strive to maintain their own place of power.

Séverine is not the only one victimized by Grandmorin, who has a history of raping and killing young girls, including Louissette, Jacques's first cousin. Louissette is first mentioned in the second chapter, where we learn that she is the daughter of Aunt Phasie and Flore's youngest sister. Louissette, employed by Grandmorin, is raped and dies of her injuries. Grandmorin is suspected of having killed Louissette from the beginning: "Des histoires avaient couru, qui accusaient de violence le président Grandmorin; mais on n'osait pas les répéter tout haut" (93). No one dares accuse Grandmorin because of his social position, which protects him from being punished for horrific crimes. Besides the narrator, who implicitly critiques Grandmorin, Flore is the character that is most judgmental of his behavior, but even she only dares criticize him under bated breath. When Flore tells Jacques that Grandmorin has practically abandoned his property at Croix-de-Maufras since Louissette's death, she implies that the reason lies in his guilt: "Oh ! depuis l'affaire de Louissette, il n'y a pas de danger que le président risque le bout de son nez à la Croix-de-Maufras" (106). Jacques is nonplussed at Flore's statement, however, suggesting two things—first, his tacit consent for Grandmorin's actions, and second, his fear of risking his own livelihood by bringing the truth to light. Nonetheless, Flore is justly angry with Grandmorin, who did, after all, kill her sister, and she feels little sympathy when she sees his corpse. As Louissette's younger sister, Flore cannot help but think of his death as just revenge: "Fini de rire avec les filles! reprit-elle plus bas. [...] Ah ! ma pauvre Louissette, ah ! le cochon, c'est bien fait" (106). Flore only vents her criticism "plus bas" though, not daring to openly vilify Grandmorin. The description of Grandmorin's body echoes her sentiment that justice has been served. The knife that killed Grandmorin left his head half-decapitated, implicitly recalling the guillotine. If state justice did not avenge Louissette's death, the knife wound mimics the violence that should have been doled out.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The punishment to Grandmorin's body is echoed in by the final scene in *Thérèse Raquin* when Thérèse, after poisoning herself, falls upon Laurent's scar (from a human bite), echoing the final "bite" of

The fourth chapter—Judge Denizet’s questioning of witnesses in Grandmorin’s murder—contains the most references to Louissette’s death, since Cabuche’s possible guilt in her murder would make him the most probable suspect for Grandmorin’s. While Louissette’s story is finally heard, it is only in order to indict the wrong suspect, Cabuche. Her demise is only investigated with such detail when her probable killer, Grandmorin, is himself murdered. The novel does not make it clear whether any inquiry was made into her death before this point. The thoroughness with which Grandmorin’s death is investigated, when compared with Louissette’s, only serves to underscore the inequalities with which justice is doled out in the Belle Époque.

Each of the witnesses questioned by Denizet provides an alternative version of Louissette’s death. First, Madame Bonnehon, Grandmorin’s sister, explains how Louissette became one of Grandmorin’s maids at the age of fourteen.<sup>117</sup> Madame Bonnehon denies that Grandmorin could have abused Louissette, calling her “une petite vicieuse” and noting her “débauche précoce,” though she admits to herself that “elle le croyait [Grandmorin] très capable d’avoir voulu la petite [Louissette]” (145). Describing Louissette’s death as “l’accident” (145), Madame Bonnehon blames Cabuche, who she assumes is Louissette’s lover even though Cabuche claims that they were nothing more than friends. Madame Bonnehon exonerates Grandmorin because he was not at home, but the following spatial description undermines his innocence: “Louissette et une autre femme faisaient le ménage du pavillon *écarté* qu’il occupait. Un matin qu’elle s’y était rendue

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the guillotine.

<sup>117</sup> We learn that Madame Bonnehon has a great deal of influence in general, using her brother’s position to advance friends and lovers to higher positions: “Par occasion et par goût, elle avait aimé dans la magistrature, recevant au château, depuis vingt-cinq ans, le monde judiciaire on lui prêtait une tendresse maternelle pour un jeune substitut, le fils d’un conseiller à la cour, M. Chaumette: elle travaillait à l’avancement du fils, elle comblait le père d’invitations et de prévenances” (142-43). Through Madame Bonnehon, Zola depicts a corrupt side to the judiciary that he will continue to develop throughout the novel. Zola illustrates how the judiciary has become corrupted by money and power like any other profession, as Denizet weakens at the offer of a promotion and the Legion of Honor: “La fonction judiciaire n’était plus qu’un métier comme un autre, et il traînait le boulet d’avancement, en solliciteur affamé, toujours prêt à plier sous les ordres du pouvoir” (171).

*seule, elle disparut*” (145; my emphasis). Zola suggests the threat of potential violence to Louisette by accentuating the fact that she was alone with Grandmorin in a secluded area. Madame Bonnehon is more preoccupied with the accusations against her brother than with Louisette’s death: “Mais l’épouvantable, ce fut que, cinq jours après, le bruit de la mort de Louisette courait, avec des détails sur un viol, tenté par mon frère, dans des circonstances si monstrueuses, que l’enfant, affolée, était allée chez Cabuche, disait-on, mourir d’une fièvre cérébrale” (146). Louisette’s relative unimportance in the community comes through in this statement, suggesting that her death is nothing but cause for idle gossip rather than state intervention. For Madame Bonnehon, Louisette died because of too much “imprudence, des nuits à la belle étoile, des vagabondages dans les marais” (146)—an explanation straight out of Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut* (1731).<sup>118</sup> It is clear that Madame Bonnehon lacks sympathy for Louisette. However, she does acknowledge that her brother may have made advances toward her: “C’est odieux, c’est impossible. [...] Il l’a embrassée, chatouillée peut-être. Il n’y a pas de crime là-dedans...” (147). Grandmorin’s sister accepts, then, his reputed behavior with house servants. Nonetheless, she excuses him from any wrongdoing by way of his social status: “Heureusement que la situation de mon frère le mettait au-dessus de tout soupçon” (147).<sup>119</sup> As we shall see in Maupassant and in Mirbeau, criminals from the upper classes in the naturalist fictive world do not subscribe to the same rules as those from the lower classes.

In the same chapter, Cabuche tells Louisette’s story, denying that they were ever lovers and describing how she arrived at his home in the forest the night of her murder: “Puis, un soir,

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<sup>118</sup> Manon dies, seemingly, of exhaustion after a brief foray into the Louisiana wilderness. Her death, meant to be tragic, can strike the contemporary reader as quite humorous, since a few hours of light hiking are not usually so fatal.

<sup>119</sup> Such a statement reminds us of *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre*, since Célestine is told in a similar manner that she will not be able to reclaim her unpaid wages because the police cannot allow a housemaid to be morally superior to her employer: “Que deviendrait la société si un domestique pouvait avoir raison d’un maître?... Il n’y aurait plus de société, Mademoiselle... ce serait l’anarchie...” (306). Zola and Mirbeau reveal the justice system to be a sham, since rules of social propriety can control who is deemed a worthy suspect.

en rentrant de la carrière, je l'ai trouvée devant ma porte, à moitié folle, si abîmée, qu'elle brûlait de fièvre. Elle n'avait pas osé rentrer chez ses parents, elle venait mourir chez moi..." (154).

Cabuche refers to Louissette's rape in oblique terms, only describing her as "abîmée." Cabuche is suspicious because he lives on his own, "en pleine forêt" and has no regular job (88). Séverine says that Cabuche is not guilty: "Tu pourrais me laisser un mois à sa garde, il ne me toucherait pas du bout des doigts, pas plus qu'il n'avait touché à Louissette, ça, j'en répons aujourd'hui" (336-37). Since she has nothing personal to gain, Séverine's statement solidifies the idea that Cabuche is innocent. In this way, Madame Bonnehon, Cabuche, and Séverine each tell their own version of Louissette's death. Their evocations of her murder constitute one of the most important evocations (per the naturalist model of analysis for STCs) of the STC in *La Bête humaine*. Both Cabuche and Madame Bonnehon underline the importance of Cabuche's forest hut as a key element in Louissette's story, but while the former sees the hut as a refuge, the latter depicts it as a further sign of Louissette's looseness.

What do we make, then, of the sexual abuse of Louissette and Séverine, as well as of their connections to each other? In other words, what is the function of this violence? Projansky notes the "timelessness" of rape narratives, how rape "is a particularly versatile narrative element that often addresses any number of other themes and social issues" (3). It is perhaps this "timelessness" that makes Louissette's story, no matter the number of iterations, invisible to the critic. While critics explore violence in *La Bête humaine*, few notice the amount of sexual violence or the connection between Louissette and Séverine. Both women are abused by Grandmorin, both die by sadistic means, and neither's case is tried in terms of rape-murder. Louissette's death does not seem to have been investigated, and Séverine's murder is interesting to the courts because of its association with Grandmorin. These two young women were exploited by a system that had little care for their deaths, because their passing did nothing to threaten that system. The train system stands in as a symbol of all French government corruption. In the next

section, I focus on how Zola developed a chronotope of the train drawing on previous sources. Using naturalist poetics, he innovates this *topos* to take on social injustices as well as to innovate new methods of writing.

Zola was certainly not the first to write about trains, as Marc Baroli's classic work (still a rich reference) on trains in French literature shows, though the Belle Époque was "l'âge d'or" for train literature. Other naturalist writers use trains for literary settings, including Maupassant in "La Maison Tellier" (1881) and the "Le Rosier de Madame Husson" (1887) (Baroli 223 and 229). In the *Rougon-Macquart*, trains are present in close to half of the texts, including *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871), *La Curée* (1872), *La Conquête de Plassans* (1874), and *Pot-Bouille* (1883), among others (Baroli 231-33). Baroli explains that since the train's introduction into the French landscape, writers from Hugo to Huysmans reacted by integrating the train and train travel into literary works across all genres. The new "paysage ferroviaire" inspired writers to create new metaphors that both personified trains and poetically represented their revolutionary speeds and perspectives good. Baroli reminds us that, long before Zola, poets and writers affiliated the modern with the prehistoric. Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, in his poem "Esquisse à la manière de Goya" (1866) describes the train as a "hydre de chaos" that "revient sous la lune, étirant ses grands os / Et faisant valoir ses vertèbres" (Baroli 135). I will show how Zola adopts these literary tropes and expands his own use of metaphor and style.

Some see echoes of the train in the structure of *La Bête humaine*, which Basilio likens to a "calligramme" (30). Lumbroso, in examining Zola's "dossiers préparatoires," observes that the author came up with several different ways of integrating the structure of the railway into the plan for *La Bête humaine*, including creating ten chapters that would correspond to the ten French railway lines (twelve chapters remain). Reflecting on his writing process, Zola also linked the creation of his novel to the structure of a train: "Vous allez peut-être me traiter de vieux romantique, mais je voudrais que mon œuvre elle-même fût comme le parcours d'un train

considérable, partant d'une tête de ligne pour arriver à un débarcadère final, avec des ralentissements et des arrêts à chaque station, c'est-à-dire à chaque chapitre" (Mitterand, *OC* 1712). Zola's vision of the novel's structure as a train may have helped him to plan individual chapters, but the final published version strays from this initial vision.<sup>120</sup> Baroli contends that, for all the similarities between *La Bête humaine* and prior works on trains,<sup>121</sup> this novel, "à la fois descriptif, épique et symbolique, est la première œuvre qui donne au monde moderne une littérature appropriée et qui lui révèle sa poésie dans toute son ampleur" (272). For Mitterand no writer before Zola "n'a encore réussi à faire de ce thème la matière d'une œuvre intense et vraiment vivante" (*OC* 1713-14). While the world of trains is "integral to the story" (Blood 51), trains are but one of the three themes, the other two being the judiciary and crime.

Since trains were still a relatively new technology, Zola exploited people's natural fears of innovation in order to create a bracing story of intrigue and corruption. Zola examines the effects of trains and other industrial changes on the rural and urban landscape and on people's social relations. He demonstrates that modernity forces people's paths to cross in unanticipated ways, with unforeseen effects, such as murder. Jacques, the main character, is a serial killer, constantly fantasizing about stabbing women that he sees in public spaces—in the street, next

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<sup>120</sup> One aspect of Zola's initial vision remains in the overall framing of the novel. The first chapter ends with a description of a departing train that anticipates the runaway train of Chapter Twelve: "Maintenant, il [the train] fuyait, et rien ne devait plus arrêter ce train lancé à toute vapeur" (80); "De nouveau, disparu, il [the train] roulait, il roulait, dans la nuit noire, on ne savait où, là-bas" (382).

<sup>121</sup> Barolo cites several direct sources for *La Bête humaine*, including Jules Claretie, with *Le Train 17* (1876), and Huysmans' *Les Sœurs Vatard* (1879), and the latter's *À Rebours* (1884), in which trains are feminized (229). Claretie's novel was the first to use a train mechanic as his main character, Martial Hébert (Baroli 216). Hébert kills himself on a train speeding out of control, similar to the ending in Zola's novel. Despite these similarities, Zola was critical of Claretie's novel, which Baroli explains as coming from Claretie's more academic leanings (221). Also, *Le Train 17* is situated in the world of trains, but is not "le roman des chemins de fer" that *La Bête humaine* will be (Baroli 222). Baroli cites Huysmans as having succeeded in creating a more totalistic vision of trains in *Les Sœurs Vatard* (224). "Son mérite n'est est que plus grand d'avoir su le premier faire d'une locomotive un personnage de roman; personnage secondaire, il est vrai, mais bien vivant. En ce sens, c'est lui qui est le précurseur le plus direct de Zola, la *Lison* étant, malgré les apparences, sœur de 'la Mioche' des *Sœurs Vatard* plus que de la *Ville-de-Calais* du *Train 17*" (Baroli 230).



door, or at the theater.<sup>122</sup> Zola's goal is to "donner le cauchemar à tout Paris" (Mitterand, *OC* 1717). So many horrible things happen on Jacques's Lison, and to those associated with its operation, that Zola succeeds in creating the train from hell. Zola showcases the inherent dangers of sharing public transport spaces with strangers. One of the most terrifying scenes in *La Bête humaine*, involving Jacques's selection of a victim on a train, has been neglected in critical discussion. For Baroli, this scene is excessive and useless to the plot, and critics seem to agree, since they usually gloss over or misrepresent it, as in the case of Baroli.<sup>123</sup> I maintain, however, that this voyeuristic scene is central to the novel in highlighting how Zola exploits fears about new technologies (or at least much more widespread) by associating them with deviant sexual practices.

In the previous chapter, I showed how Hugo juxtaposed a human drama with the machinations of the judicial system (including its terminology) in much the same way as naturalist texts; that is to say, by relying on parallelism (the confrontation of mortality shown in tandem with the everyday, in particular meals and timetables) to create irony that implicitly critiques government. In Zola, the scientific discoveries related to heredity and crime are also used to critique the government, its corruption represented as a contagious and fatal disease (*Nana*) and its unethical control over individuals as a runaway train (*La Bête humaine*). Literature as a transformative space for the investigation of social ills records, through the veil of science, the late nineteenth century's profound social changes. Whether focused on heredity, evolution, or

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<sup>122</sup> Jacques's behavior is explained as an inherited impulse, the result of his family's alcoholism and of primitive man's desire to conquer "woman" and punish her infidelity.

<sup>123</sup> "Son souci de maintenir le contact entre le train et l'intrigue se marque jusque dans des épisodes secondaires et c'est peut-être là qu'il paraît le plus excessif. [...] Il erre quelques instants dans la rue, suit quelques passantes, [...] prend un train pour Auteuil, trouve une femme seule dans un wagon, décide de la tuer sous un des tunnels de la ligne, et doit y renoncer en raison de l'arrivée d'une autre voyageuse. Là l'épisode peut paraître inutile et la présence du train nettement excessive" (Baroli 264). In fact, Jacques does not meet his victim in the train, but follows her from the street into the train station. Also, he does not renounce killing her because of her meeting with an acquaintance. Jacques listens to the conversation between the two women as he decides when and where to kill her and is only stopped when another rail worker spots him and says hello.

an investigation of the role of the subconscious, naturalist texts take up contemporary scientific theory in a functional way that relates directly to their poetics.

*La Bête humaine* stands as a text that enters into the great debates of its time surrounding criminals and their motivations.<sup>124</sup> Jacques's story, particularly in the latter half of the novel, stands out as "a case study in criminal psychology" (Blood 55). The novel itself uses terms like "psychologie criminelle."<sup>125</sup> The key Lombrosian term "criminel né" figures three times in Zola's preparatory notes for the novel, though Zola does not mention Lombroso by name (Becker 37-28).<sup>126</sup> Examples of characters in *La Bête humaine* that evoke the born criminal include Jacques, Misard, Pecqueux, and Cabuche (Becker 44). For instance, Jacques is described in the second chapter as having "[des] mâchoires trop fortes" (Zola 82), a physical sign of his potential violence. Jacques avoids women, who produce a strong physical reaction in him, a "tressaillement involontaire, qu'il tachait de maîtriser, chaque fois qu'il abordait une femme" (82). At the same time, Zola's note in his "cahiers préparatoires" to remember to embellish this portrait of the born criminal signals the possibility of satire.<sup>127</sup> Such an example clearly illustrates Vigarello's contention that "[l]'homme violent est transformé en être de signes, variés, innombrables, spécifiques, [...] L'éclaircissement du crime est attendu d'une analyse du corps" (216). Like Becker, I argue that, in addition to using Lombroso for inspiration, Zola critiques the noted Italian criminologist through his portraits of criminals by applying certain physical characteristics to

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<sup>124</sup> "Avec *La Bête humaine*, Zola prend part au grand débat scientifique et intellectuel des dernières décennies du siècle sur le criminel, sa responsabilité, les risques élevés de récidive, donc sur les dangers qu'il fait courir à la société" (Becker 48)

<sup>125</sup> "Et c'était ici que le juge [Denizet] avait montré cette profondeur de psychologie criminelle qu'on admirait tant" (363).

<sup>126</sup> While Zola's reaction to Lombroso remains ambiguous, Lombroso's opinion of *La Bête humaine* is more clear, since he devoted an article to the novel, approving of many aspects but finding the sheer number of criminals in one train station a bit high (Becker 37).

<sup>127</sup> Becker lists born criminals in the *Rougon-Macquart* as including Sarteur in *Docteur Pascal* (37), Jenlain (42) in *Germinal*, and Étienne as proposed murderer with sketched tendencies eventually changed to Jacques (41). According to Becker, Jenlain's portrait explains the "causes sociales de la criminalité" (48).

innocent characters (Cabuche).<sup>128</sup> Zola wants to show “l’illisibilité d’un homme en apparence ‘normal’” (Becker 42). Not only is Jacques an unreadable criminal, he also is the only character who kills without reason, for sheer pleasure rather than to silence a girl after raping her (in contrast to the rapists in Mirbeau and Maupassant). Zola draws on the lexicon of criminal science, including atavism, directly as a satiric send-up of political institutions, indirectly innovating his poetics through STCs.

Atavism was a key principle for criminological theory at this time. Lombroso’s view that criminal behavior could be predicted from physical characteristics, most notably atavist signs, informs much of Zola’s novel. The idea that modern man could betray aspects of primitive man provided both an explanation for criminal behavior and the necessity of a system that would track such criminal characteristics. For Lombroso, “l’opposition entre l’atavisme et le progrès” is “l’idée centrale’ du roman” (463). Examples abound of atavist traits in several male characters, most notably Roubaud, Jacques (of the powerful jaws mentioned above), and Pecqueux. For example, in the first chapter, as Roubaud beats his wife, his anger is likened to atavist leanings: “Un flot de sang montait à son crâne, ses poings d’ancien homme d’équipe se serraient, comme au temps où il poussait des wagons. Il redevenait la brute inconsciente à sa force, il l’aurait broyée [Séverine], dans un élan de fureur aveugle” (68). The use of the past conditional here implies a fatal violence that does not occur, though Roubaud beats his wife within an inch of her life. Similar descriptions anticipate violence in Jacques and Pecqueux.

Lastinger describes how often critics focus on *either* atavism *or* progress when studying *La Bête humaine*: “Alternately this work is viewed as a tale of man’s technological mastery of time and space or as the study of primitive and violent human instincts, with the weight generally toward the latter” (100). This division is somewhat artificial, since Zola is considering the effects

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<sup>128</sup> “Mais de Lombroso, dont il conteste, à travers ses portraits de Jacques ou de Cabuche, les descriptions physiques et les classifications rigoureuses amenant à des conclusions hâtives et souvent fausses (voir le personnage du juge Denizet)” (Becker 38).

of a primitive state of mind on a modern man, and the tensions between these two create many of the narrative's most dramatic moments. Zola himself constantly works to underline the contradictions between modern man and his primitive impulses throughout the novel.

In addition to repeatedly comparing male characters to primitive and brutish cavemen, Zola draws on clichés of time and space as transformative elements. In Chapter One, just after a description of Roubaud's aggression toward Séverine, which is likened to atavism, Zola includes a description of the night falling on the Saint Lazare station that echoes Roubaud's brutish behavior: "Les signaux se multipliaient, les coups de sifflet, *les sons de trompe*: de toutes parts, un à un, apparaissaient des feux, rouges, verts, jaunes, blancs; c'était une confusion, à *cette heure trouble de l'entre chien et loup*, et il semblait que tout allait se briser, et tout passait, se frôlait, se dégageait, du même mouvement doux et *rampant*, vague au fond du crépuscule" (75; my emphasis). This description brings together many elements that I investigate in this chapter. First, Zola uses a preponderant amount of anthropomorphism in describing the evening, the sounds of the train, and the movement of the crowds. The trains' whistles are like that of an elephant, the crowd crawls along like a predator, and the hour itself is "trouble," one of transformative ambiguity, a "betweenness" that is dangerous. Only Zola could invest the busy rush hour train traffic of Paris with all of the energy of a jungle scene. Secondly, this description, paired with Roubaud's behavior just prior, shows how Zola layers spatio-temporal elements to complement action. The confusion of the many trains leaving the station and the crowds pouring in and out of Saint Lazare create a furious movement that maintains the dramatic tension of the fight between Roubaud and his wife, Séverine. The parallelism between the Roubauds and the train station is all the more striking as the couple's fight remains unknown to the rest of the people living in the apartments around them—a fact that Zola emphasizes by contrasting the violence "chez les Roubaud" with the joyful domestic atmosphere of their neighbors, the Lachesnays. Lastly, I would note the layering of different senses, especially sound ("coups de sifflet," "sons de

trompe”) and sight (“les signaux,” “des feux, rouges, verts, jaunes, blancs,” “mouvement,” “crépuscule”), to emphasize the changing hour. Zola consistently works to highlight the passing of time, either through the repeated mention of time (natural changes or clock time) or through other more metaphoric means.

Because Zola’s explicit attention to time is of such central importance to *La Bête humaine*, a better understanding of the *doxa* related to time in the Belle Époque is worth examining, both in terms of historic temporal spans (the history of man and discoveries in the Belle Époque about early man), as well as the measurement of time (the nationalization of the hour in France, the growing movement for a regulated international time). Murphy examines the “cultural construction of time” in the Victorian era, but many of her observations remain pertinent when we cross the channel to *fin-de-siècle* France. According to Murphy, novels at this time can be described as “chronocentric,” reflecting technological developments and research of the period (2). As she clarifies, the temporal span of humankind had been greatly increased by scientific advancements, such as the realization (through fossil findings and the like) that prehistoric man had existed for much longer than previously thought. It is important to underline this newfound concern with prehistoric history, an emphasis that Murphy places as starting in the 1830s, for several reasons. First, despite continuing arguments in the U.S. to the contrary, today most people are quite comfortable and familiar with the idea that man has existed for tens of thousands of years as well as with the place of *homo sapiens* within evolutionary history. Emphasizing how astoundingly novel such information was to nineteenth-century man will help us understand some of the particular uses of atavism in naturalist fiction. Many critics, for example, poke fun at Zola’s supposed clumsy depiction of Jacques Lantier in *La Bête humaine*, which includes several references to prehistoric drives. Placed within the context of the excitement of evolutionary history, however, Zola’s fiction seems far less bizarre. Secondly, the new knowledge about the extended temporal span of humanity explains the foregrounding of STCs in *fin-de-siècle* texts as

a way of avoiding what I would call a certain existential vertigo. As Murphy aptly explains, “[i]n raising the prospects of an immeasurable past, uncertain future, and incessant change, scientific findings generated vexing questions about humanity's origins and possibilities that left Victorians uncertain as to their placement within a dizzying temporal span” (12). Writers interested in innovative scientific developments give added weight to temporality, then, as a reaction to feeling “out of time.”

Beyond the new discoveries in primitive mankind that inform *La Bête humaine*, the novel combines such knowledge with the Belle Époque figure of the *flâneur*, producing a pathological peregrinator that combines aspects of the modern with the primitive in terrifying new ways. Andrew Counter, however, views Zola’s vision of the “demonic *flâneur*” as inscribed within a tradition of murder that anticipates Freud rather than critiquing Lombroso (32).<sup>129</sup> Counter’s argument is particularly convincing as a way to explain the primitive relationship between men and woman expounded in the novel, expressed most directly when Jacques tries to explain to himself his need to murder women: “Cela venait-il donc de si loin, du mal que les femmes avaient fait à sa race, de la rancune amassée de mâle en mâle, depuis la première tromperie au fond des cavernes? Et il sentait aussi, dans son accès, une nécessité de bataille pour conquérir la femelle et la dompter, le besoin pervers de la jeter morte sur son dos, ainsi qu’une proie qu’on arrache aux autres, à jamais” (Zola 99). Counter sees the “première tromperie” as “the repressed murder of the father” that manifests itself as “an irrational grudge against women” (32). Besides Zola, Counter describes a host of other works that popularized primitive man, including Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886): “So once again, as in Stevenson’s ‘strange case’, the troglodytic ancestor refuses to remain confined in the past, but is instead released as a demonic *flâneur*, wandering the civilized cityscape in search of a victim” (33).

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<sup>129</sup> As Baguley had noted for earlier years of Zola studies, an interest in psychoanalytic issues continues in Zola studies today, with many recent scholars applying Freud’s death drive to *La Bête humaine* (Downings, Bell).

Counter's analogy, in so far as it describes the beast within man as separate and distinct, is particularly apt for *La Bête humaine*. Zola's male characters seem momentarily possessed by primitive instincts rather than inherently primitive themselves. Roubaud, for instance, when he is violently beating his wife, "[retombe] à l'unique besoin d'apaiser la bête hurlante au fond de lui" (72-73). The analogy with an English work of fiction is also appropriate given that Jack the Ripper and Jacques Lantier share behavioral characteristics as well as similar first names, a conscious move on Zola's part.

In the following sections, I trace the similarities between Jacques Lantier and real-life models, including Joseph Vacher and Jack the Ripper. The first serial killer in French literature, Jacques elevates the dramatic tensions of spaces he traverses, as I show later in this chapter. Here, I concern myself with the extent to which Jacques, by picking female victims only, heightens a present and accepted violence against women that gives tacit approval for Grandmorin's abuse of Séverine and for the unsolved rape-murder of Louissette.

### *Jacques l'Éventreur*

The press sensation that is the murders of Jack the Ripper in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888 directly precedes the writing and publication of *La Bête humaine*.<sup>130</sup> Victorian London had many similarities with Paris in the 1880s, such as the anxieties caused by shifting gender roles and sexuality. People were concerned with "dangerous sexualities," and crime stories that featured grisly tales became very popular. The London murders attributed to Jack the Ripper raised questions that Zola echoed in *La Bête humaine*: "Why would a man [...] feel compelled repeatedly to murder, mutilate, and display the bodies of women, bodies that were

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<sup>130</sup> The Ripper events have been commemorated by the city of London in the very area they took place. Tourists can take a guided tour, complete with informative placards at the site of each victim. There is some irony in the continuing commodification of these murders.

sexually available to him for a few pennies?” (Ruddick 182).<sup>131</sup> Ruddick discusses how the Ripper narratives promoted anxiety, “encouraging women to fear the Ripper and to confine themselves to the domestic sphere” (183). Judith Walkowitz examines the Jack the Ripper narrative as a “warning that the city was a dangerous place when they [women] transgressed the narrow boundary of home and hearth to enter public space” (3). I would emphasize the spatial-temporal aspects of this reaction, chiefly that one gender (women) limits its movements based on a series of unprecedented (and rare) nocturnal events. While the victims were women who prostituted themselves at night, the Ripper—as constructed and disseminated by the media—created fears for *all* women, everywhere, and these fears were not confined to the evening hours.<sup>132</sup> For any woman to be made increasingly anxious about moving through public spaces because of the Ripper is irrational. Given the barrage of newspaper coverage surrounding the Whitechapel events, however, it is understandable that women felt less emboldened to venture too far. In some ways, then, it was not so much the events themselves that made women want to stay inside, but rather, the media saturation of these events. Moreover, it is no coincidence that dominant ideologies, supported by the media, would wish to limit women’s movements just at a time when women were more independent than ever, enough to warrant the creation of a new figure, the New Woman.

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<sup>131</sup> Ruddick compares Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) with *La Bête humaine*, noting the centrality of the railroad in both, as well as the influence of the 1888 Whitechapel murders. Ruddick gives Zola credit for not supernaturalizing the serial killer figure in *La Bête humaine*, “not only by his sympathetic depiction of Jacques but also by satirizing the demonizing tendencies of the ignorant and prejudiced,” such as the implicit critique of Cabuche (185). “Both [Zola and Tolstoy] attempted to identify and account for the elusive figure of the gynecidal maniac, not as the already legendary and supernaturalized Ripper—a werewolf, ogre or vampire—but as a characteristic product of his time, whose extreme behavior has an explicable logic” (Ruddick 185).

<sup>132</sup> We can view these as constructed fears as because it would be extremely unlikely for any one woman to become the next victim, particularly if she did not share any of the characteristics of the victims (poor prostitutes in London). While all fears are largely unsubstantiated (i.e., it is unlikely that the average person will be bitten by a shark or struck by lightning), fears like those of public spaces that are based on gender are different in that women must traverse these spaces in any case.



The New Woman, which Murphy examines at length (as does Mary Louise Roberts), is nowhere to be found in *La Bête humaine*. She is wiped out of existence in much of naturalist fiction, as elsewhere. In her place, Zola and other naturalist writers place women in precarious situations of varying degrees of danger. I am not suggesting that groups of men sat plotting ways to ensnare women in domestic imprisonment. On the contrary, I believe that the increased portrayal of a world ridden with dangers was a projection of men's fears about women's increasing independence: "For to foment female anxiety was to deflect attention from men's own anxieties about the increasing movement of women outside their traditional sphere" (Ruddick 183). What Ruddick is rightly suggesting is that as women become increasingly independent, and in unprecedented ways—with increased legal rights, access to new professions and education, etc.—tensions rose. When the Ripper events were relayed through media outlets, these tensions spawned an exaggerated treatment of the dangers that Jack the Ripper posed for the average citizen. The average woman was much more likely to be beaten by her husband, or raped by someone she knew. On some level, saying that women should be afraid to move freely through the city is, then, a suggestion that women should be afraid to move into new societal spaces, including spaces related to education, jobs, or the like.

In *La Bête humaine*, we witness a similar exaggeration of a rare form of crime—sadistic murder—from a first-person perspective and in great detail. Gynecide, as Ruddick terms it—"men killing women for sexual reasons" (184)—occurs in *La Bête humaine*, as well as other texts in this study. Zola, however, develops the perspective of the killer more than any other.

Interestingly enough, Zola's setting the novel in the late-1860s parallels the development of interest in this type of fiction, according to Mitterand: "C'est dans les dernières années du Second Empire que commencent à fleurir, dans la presse parisienne, les récits d'assassinats, les comptes rendus des enquêtes policières et des procès d'assises, les reportages d'exécutions capitales" (*OC* 1710). Zola gives a very *fin-de-siècle* twist, however, to his tale by creating the character of the

serial killer, and by narrating his point of view. While I agree with Ruddick for complimenting Zola on recognizing “the sexual-political dimension of the murders” and on responding “with remarkably forthright attempts to account for the motive for gynocide” (192), my analysis shows how Zola further entrenches existing gender norms in his account of sexual crime.

In creating the murderous character of Jacques Lantier, Zola drew on many models, including Jack the Ripper. In fact, Zola marketed his text by saying that the main character, Jacques Lantier, was a sort of Jack the Ripper *à la française*. Serial killers have been present throughout history. Gilles de Rais killed hundreds of peasant children in fifteenth-century France and blamed the devil. In the sixteenth century, Gilles Garnier claimed the lives of dozens and claimed to be a werewolf, an accepted explanation at the time.<sup>133</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, Papavoine slashed two young boys in the Bois de Vincennes, and *Le Petit Journal* sensationalized the event. In 1880, Louis Ménesclou killed a young girl, chopped her body into pieces, and tried to burn the corpse in his Parisian apartment. Literature reckoned with these events, drawing on popular and classical mythology to invest characters with more dramatic traits. Only with Jack the Ripper, however, could the press mobilize and disseminate information while the events were occurring.

In addition to Jack the Ripper’s murders, the crimes in *La Bête humaine* are based on several “fait divers” all rolled into one, including the Fenayron, Poinot, and Barrême cases (Mitterand, *OC* 1715). Becker cites sources for Jacques in Lombroso, who himself drew on case studies from other prominent French doctors like Magnan and Esquirol. There were different

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<sup>133</sup> Early in *La Bête humaine*, Zola likens the violence of Roubaud to that of a wolf and suggests a transformation akin to that of the werewolf. Just as Jacques’s homicidal violence is compared to a “mal,” here Roubaud’s violent state is described as being more akin to the behavior of a wild animal, in this case a wolf: “Séverine regardait son mari aller, venir, tourner furieusement, comme elle aurait regardé un loup, un être d’une autre espèce [...]. [C]e qui l’épouvantait, c’était de sentir l’animal, soupçonné par elle depuis trois ans, à des grognements sourds, aujourd’hui déchainé, enragé, prêt à mordre” (73).

schools of thought regarding how to approach evolutionary biology in the Belle Époque.<sup>134</sup> But it is Becker's phrasing that interests me more than these sources: "Pour décrire les crises de folie homicide de Jacques, Zola s'inspire de cas repris par Lombroso à Magnan et à Esquirol: un homme part, dans la nuit, un couteau à la main, tue des passants, puis reste étonné pendant six jours et oublie tout" (Becker 47). By describing the victims as "[des] passants," Becker suggests the possibility of male victims implicitly. All of the major criminological researchers, including Lombroso and Krafft-Ebing,<sup>135</sup> documented a mix of male and female fatalities in real cases. While some of the victims were male, some of the killers were female. Nonetheless, when writers fictionalize these situations, they tend to use female victims and male killers.<sup>136</sup> Such a lack of "parity" among victims serves to place women in a more vulnerable position.

Even though modern readers may be quick to recognize the misogynistic tendencies of many writers to cast women as victims, what is less transparent are Belle Époque definitions for (and the understanding of) sexually violent crimes. Vigarello explains how criminals were classified—each a separate genus according to the crime (thus linking evolutionary biology to criminology)—and how nineteenth-century law began to differentiate between "l'accusé qui vole,

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<sup>134</sup> The famed doctor Lacassagne (who testified for the Vacher case) strongly disagrees with Lombroso, who popularized the idea of a "born criminal": "L'existence de stigmates physiques définitivement identifiables n'est plus jugée crédible dès les années 1890, comme n'est plus jugée crédible une vieille indifférence aux 'causes sociales', ces faits que Lacassagne prétend déterminants, comparant leur rôle déclencheur à celui du terrain organique pour la virulence microbienne" (Vigarello 217). As these classifications were questioned, we find more attention paid in literature to the "monster" in each of us, a development closely tied to the emerging field of psychology and the power of the subconscious.

<sup>135</sup> Sexologist Krafft-Ebing established the foundation for today's criminal profiling: "Le psychiatre de la fin du siècle peut s'attribuer pour la première fois un rôle de protecteur public" (Vigarello 233). "Krafft-Ebing est le premier à définir le thème des perversions sexuelles, suggérant leur diversité, leur inépuisable inventivité. Il est surtout le premier à souligner leurs correspondances possibles avec les crimes et les délits, multipliant les exemples d'outrages à la pudeur susceptibles d'être traduits en actes d' 'exhibitionnisme' ou les exemples de cruautés sexuelles susceptibles d'être traduits en actes de 'sadisme'. L'attention au profil personnel de l'agresseur ne peut plus être négligée" (Vigarello 218).

<sup>136</sup> While we can cite Flore as a female killer in *La Bête humaine*, she kills herself almost immediately after her unsuccessful attempt to murder Jacques, while Jacques seems unaffected by having killed Séverine.

celui qui viole ou celui qui tue” (214).<sup>137</sup> It is also at this time that the word “violeur” entered the French language.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, while today sex crime is well defined (though still contested in its definitions), both judicially and in everyday life, it was only in the late 1800s that rape was first seen as a crime that sustained long-term effects on the victim.<sup>139</sup>

Modern research confirms some aspects of the work of early criminologists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing—one of the first to establish characteristics for serial murderers. Louis B. Schlesinger, in his study of serial offenders, examines Krafft-Ebing’s charting of the main components of sexual homicide, and finds a large portion of the classifications to be theoretically valid. Many of these components can be found in Zola’s portrait of Jacques Lantier, including the designation of murder as an “overpowering compulsion” (Schlesinger 10). In fact, a host of men in *La Bête humaine* correspond to Krafft-Ebing’s portrait of the serial killer. Jacques certainly is the most detailed characterization of a murderer, but many of the other main male characters can be likened to killers in training.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Vigarello illustrates this with the example of Zola’s Jacques Lantier, “avec sa longue hérédité de misère et d’alcool, ses ‘mâchoires trop fortes’, ses cheveux trop drus, ses indices de désordre cachés sous ‘un visage rond et régulier’, traversé par ‘l’instinct du rapt’ comme par ‘la soif héréditaire du meurtre’” that transforms “en ‘bête humaine’ par un Zola lecteur de Lombroso” (215).

<sup>138</sup> “Le violeur devient pour la première fois un terrain d’étude, un exemple permettant de mieux comprendre le viol” (Vigarello 215). However, the word “pedophile” is not invented until 1925.

<sup>139</sup> “La fin du XIXe siècle marque, de fait, un moment clé dans l’histoire du viol: la définition du crime, celle qui prend clairement en compte la violence physique et la violence morale, précisant chantage, menace ou surprise, y est acquise pour plusieurs décennies [...] la systématisation comme la sophistication des techniques de police font exister le viol-meurtre et le ‘tueur violeur en série’ sur lequel une presse nationale plus dense peut mobiliser l’opinion; une médecine légale instrumentée instaure l’expertise en démarche obligée; une statistique administrative depuis longtemps cumulée quantifie l’accroissement des crimes sexuels tout en mobilisant pour la première fois thèses médicales et études spécialisées. Juridiquement comme culturellement, la vision du viol entre dans notre temps” (Vigarello 242-43).

<sup>140</sup> The only male character that seems docile and non-violent is Cabuche, but even his voyeuristic and fetishist tendencies (spying on Séverine, stealing small objects from her room) are early signs of homicidal tendencies, proven by early and contemporary criminal research.

### *A Brief Encounter*

If, as Keith Tester maintains, the *flâneur* goes indoors in the second half of the century, Zola brings him back outside and makes him armed and dangerous. Through the character of Jacques Lantier, Zola demonizes the *flâneur*. Though this figure has received much attention in critical literature, too often critics have insisted on the *flâneur*'s supposed mastery of space and time. While Zola herds his female characters, male characters are free to roam, particularly in the figure of the *flâneur*. The urban walker, a figure to which Baudelaire often compared himself, dawdles and observes the crowd.<sup>141</sup> In contrast to these critical discourses, *La Bête humaine* exaggerates all of the *flâneur*'s negative qualities, making him, to borrow Caputi's phrase, "hypermasculine" (115). Whereas the average *flâneur* simply observes the world, Jacques tracks down individuals with the intent to kill them. Because Zola constantly shifts perspectives from character to character, we can access Jacques's own reflections on his past attempts to rape and to kill.

Jacques retraces the history of his own violence, remembering his first assault against a young relative: "Il se rappelait bien, il était âgé de seize ans à peine, la première fois, lorsque le mal l'avait pris, un soir qu'il jouait avec une gamine, la fillette d'une parente, sa cadette de deux ans: elle était tombée, il avait vu ses jambes, et il s'était rué" (98). Jacques's violence is likened to an outside force, "le mal," and this analogy continues throughout the novel. Moreover, "ruer" connotes an animalistic lexical field—a horse's kicking. Violent behavior is repeatedly compared to beastly tendencies. Despite these linguistic clues regarding Jacques's murderous tendencies, though, access to Jacques's thoughts is still rather opaque. A series of brief phrases encapsulate the assault—the girl fell, he saw her legs, and he rushed in on her.

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<sup>141</sup> Wilson observes that the "sophisticated urban consciousness" shown by the Parisian *flâneur* of the second half of the century was largely a "male consciousness," with the city offering all kinds of sexual possibilities (5). Women were the subjects of the male gaze in painting and the public arena, including cafés where "men of the bourgeoisie could meet and seduce or purchase working-class women" (56).

An additional episode swiftly follows this first, especially key for anticipating another important scene contemporary to the novel's events, as well as for showing the completion of Jacques's development as an obsessive killer. As with Séverine, Jacques uses a knife as his chosen weapon. Likewise, the assault is planned out in more detail rather than occurring spontaneously, echoed by the more developed description, though the victim is a stranger: "L'année suivante, il se souvenait d'une autre, une petite blonde, qu'il voyait chaque matin passer devant sa porte. Celle-ci avait un cou très gras, très rose, où il choisissait déjà la place, un signe brun, sous l'oreille" (98). Jacques stalks his unknown victim on a daily basis, an added detail to his profile as a serial killer. Stalking is "a crime involving acts of pursuit of an individual over time that are threatening and potentially dangerous" (Meloy 2). Stalking appears in literature as an accepted cliché of falling in love and has been featured in works from Shakespeare to Louisa May Alcott and Kierkegaard.<sup>142</sup> The ambiguity between amorous pursuit and dangerous stalking perhaps explains why stalking was not considered a criminal act until the late twentieth century. Zola is the first to justify this more-or-less accepted behavior to the point of murder. I believe that Jacques's behavior is a symptom in Zola of "hyper-masculinity," rather than—as the narrative would put it—of a somehow distinctive "mal."

While Jacques's development as a serial killer is almost complete at an early age, it is not until the end of the novel—when he murders Séverine—that he comes to terms with the horror of the act of killing. Jacques describes his own revulsion at his impulse to kill women in terms of the collection of spaces in which he encounters potential victims: "Puis, c'en étaient d'autres, d'autres encore, un défilé de cauchemar, toutes celles qu'il avait effleurées de son désir brusque de meurtre, les femmes coudoyées dans la rue, les femmes qu'une rencontre faisait ses voisines, une surtout, une nouvelle mariée, assise près de lui au théâtre, qui riait très fort, et qu'il avait dû

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<sup>142</sup> Meloy points out Louisa May Alcott's work, *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866), while Glen Skoler has studied Shakespeare's *Dark Lady Sonnets* (1609) as emblematic of stalking behaviors.

fuir, au milieu d'un acte, pour ne pas l'éventrer" (98-99).<sup>143</sup> Zola emphasizes "le toucher" in this quotation ("effleurer," "coudoyer," "éventrer"), as well as spatial proximity ("dans la rue," "assise près de lui"). When reading this passage, which corresponds to Kraaft-Ebing's description of the progressive development of sadistic killer, the reader feels voyeuristic, since the potential victims are unaware of possible dangers. These women are progressively defined in the passage in a more detailed manner—from "d'autres," "celles," and "les femmes" to "ses voisines" and "une nouvelle mariée." Zola's use of an accumulation here functions as an efficient means to show the rapidity with which people become closer in urban settings, particularly in the ambiguous phrase, "les femmes qu'une rencontre faisait ses voisines," which can be read in a multitude of ways. The less insidious reading would be that in *fin-de-siècle* Paris it is often possible to go from being strangers to acquaintances very rapidly because of the dense population and more relaxed social conventions. Given the tone of the passage, however, it seems that Jacques himself feels a familiarity with potential victims as he follows them, although the women may be completely unaware of his presence. Regardless of the uncertain meaning of this quotation, it is clear that Jacques has previously raped women and has already come quite close to killing at least one.

The impetus for the train scene in which Jacques unsuccessfully attempts to stab an unknown female passenger is his attempt to avoid killing his own mistress, Séverine. In early morning, Jacques leaves the private space of his apartment for the public space of Paris after a tortuous night of insomnia. Armed with a knife, he desperately observes each woman that he passes as a potential victim. As Jacques traverses various public spaces—the street, the train station, the train itself—city space reveals itself to be highly gendered, because Zola exaggerates the threats to women in daily life.

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<sup>143</sup> One of Zola's early ideas was to have Jacques kill a woman at the theater (Becker 43). As in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (*The Technique of Love*), the author counsels men that the theater is one of the best places to chase women. The link that Ovid made between hunting and love turns more violent in Zola.

The progressive development of this scene is similar to that of Jacques's recollection of his first experiences with sadistic homicide (Chapter Two). Here, however, Jacques is ready to commit the deed and has thus become a much more dangerous stalker. As he walks, Jacques follows several potential victims. His pursuit is aided by nature, as the thick snow muffles his footsteps. He first follows an older woman: "Tout de suite, il avait aperçu une vieille femme; mais elle tournait le coin de la rue de Londres, il ne la suivait pas. Des hommes le coudoyèrent, il descendit vers la place du Havre, en serrant le couteau, dont la pointe relevée disparaissait sous sa manche" (260). The mention of Jacques's knife hidden beneath his sleeve creates a terrifying urban scene. While the first unsuccessful target is of mature age, Jacques's next potential victim is a young adolescent. She goes into a bakery, though, and because Jacques is too impatient to wait he searches ever more desperately for a body to stab. Each time that he picks out a woman, however, he quickly dismisses her because of an obstacle. For example, he follows two women, but they meet up with a man: "Cet homme le dérangeant, il se mit à suivre une autre femme qui passait" (260). The assumption here is that the man's presence will protect the women.

Jacques's next victim is alone. She is the first woman to notice Jacques's pursuit: "Sans doute, elle s'aperçut que ce garçon la suivait, et ses yeux se tournèrent vers lui, avec un navrement indicible, étonnée qu'on pût vouloir d'elle" (261). The woman tries to out pace Jacques and lose him in the busy streets, but he is able to follow her very closely: "Déjà, elle l'avait mené au milieu de la rue du Havre, elle se retourna deux fois encore, l'empêchant à chaque fois de lui planter dans la gorge le couteau, qu'il sortait de sa manche. Elle avait des yeux de misère, si implorants ! Là-bas, lorsqu'elle descendrait du trottoir, il frapperait" (261). The use of the conditional anticipates Jacques's violence despite the fact that it never comes to fruition, adding more dramatic tension to the scene. He quickly changes his mind, making a detour to follow a final young woman walking in the opposite direction. There is no rhyme or reason to Jacques's *pérégrination*, as if he moves on pure instinct alone: "Cela sans raison, sans volonté,



parce qu'elle passait à cette minute, et que c'était ainsi" (261). Jacques manages to maintain his focus on the young woman long enough to follow her into the train station, where the scene becomes even more terrifying. In this passage, Zola contrasts the lighthearted conversation of a young bourgeois mother traveling alone with the thoughts of a dangerous murderer, suggesting to his readers how in modern society such a man can quickly and simply pick his victims.<sup>144</sup> In addition, Zola shows how a detached male gaze observes female characters, while male characters can move (unobserved) through a variety of social spaces. While Jacques does not end up killing any of the women he observes (at least in this scene), such a narrative would give any female reader pause. The ease with which Jean Renoir adapted the novel in 1938 to film, keeping most of the scenes of sexual violence without changing them, illustrates how seamless tropes of sexual violence have become.

In the train station, Jacques's final victim (unlike the previous woman on the street) is completely unaware that he is following her, even though he is close behind as she goes into the station, buys a ticket, and boards the train: "elle était adorablement jolie, vingt ans au plus, grasse déjà, blonde, avec de beaux yeux de gaieté qui riaient à la vie. Elle ne remarqua même pas qu'un homme la suivait. [...] Et, comme elle demandait un billet de première classe pour Auteuil, Jacques en prit également un, l'accompagna à travers les salles d'attente, sur le quai, jusque dans le compartiment, où il s'installa, à côté d'elle" (261). Her demeanor is youthful and innocent, and the contrast between her relaxed manner and the danger of which she is unaware heightens the reader's anxiety. The scene then alternates between the murderer determining the precise moment when he will stab the woman in the neck and her very intimate conversation with a friend (whom she runs into on the train), in which she reveals her bourgeois background and many details of her

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<sup>144</sup> Women in the city were viewed in paradoxical ways, as Wilson points out. Wilson likens women to a kind of sphinx because of the contradictions in their representation. "Woman is present in cities as temptress, as whore, as fallen woman, as lesbian, but also as virtuous womanhood in danger, as heroic womanhood who triumphs over temptation and tribulation" (6).

young family. Jacques first thinks, “J’ai le temps, [...] je la tuerai sous un tunnel” (262). As we will see in Maupassant’s “La Petite Roque,” Zola ties common expressions (“avoir le temps”) to graphically violent acts, underscoring the killer’s lack of feeling. Just as the space of the city is gendered in Zola in terms of the tracking of female victims, we will see in the next section that temporal practices in the novel, which are likewise fraught with gender concerns, show innovation in naturalist poetics.

In the same way that Jacques evokes the times and places where he is tempted to kill, the actual planning and carrying out of the many crimes featured in the text depends on *mastering* time and space in order to elude the authorities. Not only must a criminal slip in and out of different spaces to commit a crime, but he must also work to make space and time serve his advantage when covering the crime up, creating an imaginary alibi that will establish his innocence. When Roubaud and Séverine murder Grandmorin (Chapter Two), they take special care to move between train carriages without being seen, going so far as to return to their seats by going along the outside of the train—a trip that is vertiginous to the utmost as described by Séverine. With the complicity of Jacques, the guilty couple establishes a firm alibi that eliminates them from the list of chief suspects. Likewise, when Jacques later kills Séverine (Chapter Twelve), he manages to account for his time to the minute. In both of these homicides, as in all the deaths that occur in *La Bête humaine*, train schedules are used to time murders and manipulated to conceal guilt. The criminal investigators work to overcome such mastery by establishing the “emploi du temps” of each suspect, looking for inconsistencies so that the real murderer will become apparent. At no time before in French history has it been easier to know a suspect’s whereabouts, evident from the strict daily schedules of various characters in *La Bête humaine*.

Time is a central concern for Zola that is intimately bound up in spatial considerations. Zola’s attention to temporality was never truer than when he was working on *La Bête humaine*,

for he was running out of time to finish his envisioned twenty novels.<sup>145</sup> One of the key ways in which Zola establishes the corruption and degeneration of modern man is in his use of temporality. In the following section, I demonstrate the way in which Zola demonizes the modern rationalization of time, in which an individual's daily life is governed by ever more smaller units of time. Zola links individual characters' temporal practices to their inscription within a corrupt system over which they have little control.

Not only do we see a preliminary attention to temporality, but also a strict adherence, on Zola's part, to his notes. In preparing to write *La Bête humaine*, Zola explains that he only uses the "dossiers" he has made for each theme and character within the projected novel as a starting point and an anchor: "Comme le disait Flaubert, prendre des notes, c'est simplement honnête; mais les notes prises, il faut savoir les mépriser" (OC 1752). Folios 171-76 focus on "les horaires et la vie d'une gare" (OC 1704). Folio 296 lists the "horaires de service de Jacques, pendant une semaine" (OC 1704). Folios 464-69, as well as 529-35, concentrate on "l'express de 6h30" (OC 1705).<sup>146</sup> Zola insists on the train's time of departure, as we shall see, and this is important because it foregrounds time through repetition. The train becomes synonymous with its time of departure and arrival, as if the train is time itself.<sup>147</sup> In addition to, and in coordination with, creating suspense, marking time establishes textual rhythms, in a similar way to *Le Dernier*

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<sup>145</sup> In 1890, Zola was only fifty years old, but he had plans to finish the series and move on to other projects, such as the *Trois Villes* series—with *Paris* (1893), *Rome* (1896), and *Lourdes* (1898)—and *Quatre Évangiles*. Begun in 1898, the *Quatre Évangiles* included *Fécondité* (1899), *Travail* (1901), *Justice* (1903, published posthumously), and *Vérité*, planned but never started. This last detail is more than ironic, given the importance of "vérité" to Zola. In the closing line of his famous letter defending Alfred Dreyfus (published in *L'Aurore* in 1898), he declaimed "La vérité est en marche et rien ne l'arrêtera."

<sup>146</sup> A key source for Zola's preparation was *Les Chemins de Fer* by Pol-Jean Lefèvre (1897), which Zola consulted while preparing *La Bête humaine* (Mitterand, OC 1729). We should note that Lefèvre referred to trains by number, such as "train 45 du Havre" (Mitterand, OC 1730).

<sup>147</sup> The national rail network actually changed time; to account for late train arrivals, Paris time was five minutes late (Corbin 11). Murphy cites the railway as bringing the largest changes, forcing Victorians to move from a more "casual" relationship to time to a more precise "tracking" of "time's passage" (12).

*Jour*.<sup>148</sup> Instead of a march toward certain death by capital punishment, however, Zola's novel is a train racing toward the dramatic end to the Second Empire, a runaway locomotive with no conductor carrying soldiers toward the front of the Franco-Prussian war.<sup>149</sup>

### A Time to Kill

The importance of time as a measurement and a metaphor in *La Bête humaine* is key to understanding the novel's structure. While in today's digital society we are accustomed to seeing reminders of time to the minute on every television, microwave, and bank sign, in the era depicted in *La Bête humaine* (roughly 1870), time was much less visible and more audible. Church bells chimed each quarter hour, as Hugo depicted in *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné*. By this point, however, the developing middle-class could easily purchase pocket watches. This made keeping track of time a personal matter, though public announcements of time persisted. In short, society moved from the tolling of the village clock to a world where the clock's second hand became as important as the hour and where the individual possessed his or her own time-keeping devices.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> While references to actual time-keeping devices like clocks are rarer than references to train time, they are quite frequent in *La Bête Humaine* compared to other works. Devices mentioned include public clocks (church bells, clocks inside stores) and private clocks (the "coucou" in the house): "devant le coucou qui marquait trois heures vingt" (55); "la demie sonna" (56); "Déjà quatre heures un quart" (65); "Dans le jour mourant, il regarda l'heure au coucou" (75); "l'horloge marquait six heures vingt sept" (78); "six heures venait de sonner" (90); "cinq heures du matin venaient de sonner à tous les cloches" (109); "six heures sonnaient" (112); "l'horloge marquait huit heures trente cinq" (115); "on entendit sonner cinq heures, à une horloge voisine" (177); "le coucou [...] se mit à sonner onze heures" (242); "le coucou venait de sonner trois heures" (257); "lorsque la pendule sonna trois heures" (273). Zola's novel also includes the following statistics: references to "horloge" (ten), "coucou" (six), "montre" (thirty-three), "seconde" (sixteen), "minute" (fifty), and "instant" (seventy).

<sup>149</sup> In fact, a runaway train would have stopped after about half an hour, but Zola decided that the truth was less interesting than the chaotic image of speed that he wished to create. Critics who defined Naturalism as an effort to strictly portray reality do best to forget this detail, since Zola is clearly manipulating facts to create a more dramatic fiction.

<sup>150</sup> Jimena Canales argues that the second acquired great importance during the late nineteenth century, with time measurement devices becoming increasingly precise: "Chronoscopes, chronographs, and myographs measured time in much smaller units, well into thousandths of a second" (2). Yvonne Bargues

Referring again to Table 1.1 (132), we see that men account more often than not for the justification for descriptions of time. Even in scenes in which female characters are solely responsible for marking time (Chapters Five and Ten), there are significant differences. Unlike Roubaud and Jacques, Séverine does not mention train time or her own private timepiece when she marks the hour. We know from cultural studies that by the late nineteenth century, it was quite common for women to have their own watches, and considering how much Roubaud spoils his wife by spending vast amounts of money on clothing, it strikes me as odd that she does not possess her own watch.<sup>151</sup> Instead, she relies on public clocks or clocks that she does not own, unlike male characters: “comme [Séverine] débuchait dans la rue Saint-Lazare, elle vit, à l’horloge d’un bijoutier, qu’il était six heures moins vingt” (180); on the other hand, Jacques consults his own watch: “Il regarda *sa* montre et vit qu’il était quatre heures déjà” (264; my emphasis). To have a timepiece to oneself in a text that accords such import to the marking of time is significant. Zola creates this gender difference, perhaps unconsciously, but even so, this choice adds to women’s general lack of agency in the novel. Furthermore, such a distinction marks a departure from (or an extension of) Hamon’s view that the vocabulary in Zolian descriptions is based on a character’s identity rather than on that of the narrator.<sup>152</sup> If we take Hamon’s theory one step further, to include gender, Séverine’s lack of a watch (as reflected in descriptions justified by her character) signals her lack of overall power and inability to direct her

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Rollins examines the role of the instant in *La Bête humaine*, focusing on the tunnel murder and Flore’s attempt to derail the Paris express.

<sup>151</sup> In the first chapter of *La Bête humaine*, Roubaud pokes fun Séverine for having purchased so many items during their time in Paris. In so doing, Roubaud alludes to the fact that her outfits do not match the social status of an assistant station chief’s wife: “Fichte! dit Roubaud sais, tu te mets bien, toi, pour la femme d’un sous-chef!... Mais tu n’avais à prendre que six chemises et une paire de bottines ?” (59). The passage notes that Séverine was overcome with emotion at her shopping trip to Le Bon Marché, a subtle reference by Zola to his previous novel, *Au Bonheur des dames*, based on Le Bon Marché, Paris’s first modern department store.

<sup>152</sup> Hamon refers to this technique as the “regard descripteur” that attempts to “effacer autant que possible toute trace d’intervention de l’auteur-narrateur dans sa fiction” (*La Description littéraire* 264). He cites Jacques in *La Bête humaine* as an example of a “personnage-truchement” for the use of nomenclature related to trains.

own life. Unlike Jacques or Grandmorin, she cannot make her own way through the day without relying on others. Having one's own watch allows a person a margin of control over the strict daily schedule that so many characters in this novel possess.

Regardless of whether one consulted a watch or a town clock, however, the hour itself was an ambiguous affair. Time was not nationalized in France until the end of the century. Alain Corbin elucidates the slow “normalisation des références” (13), meaning that clock time was different, depending on region. The “temporal confusion” of varying village times, Murphy explains, led to the rationalization of national time, and eventually international time, though these changes were not met without resistance.<sup>153</sup> The government gradually took over control of temporal practices from the Church during the Third Republic, first to regulate workdays and then—in 1891—to enforce the idea of the “trois huit” (eight hours of work, eight hours of rest, eight hours of education). As time became more disciplined, breaks were reduced and interrupting the workday with time at the pub “tend à se muer en un travail continu, surveillé, à la productivité calculée, comme peut l’être celle de la machine concurrente” (Corbin 15). The fear of filling “des heures vides” became an obsession, and even free time became increasingly planned and scheduled. The rise of household account books, diaries (particularly for women), and the daily planner, attest to the development of keeping a written record of one's time.

It is trains that are shown in *La Bête humaine* to promote an ever more precise management of time in French society. Time was always a tyrant, but the vast changes imposed by the spread of trains only made it more oppressive. In this section, I investigate the function of time in *La Bête humaine* and its relation to the prevalent violence in the text. First, I list and categorize the myriad of references to time throughout the novel—clock time, train times, and the different kinds of time-keeping devices. While critics have mentioned time's role in the novel, no

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<sup>153</sup> We can contrast the way provincial characters, particularly farmers, reject modernization in Zola's *La Terre*, versus characters in *La Bête humaine*, where “l'emploi du temps” is an obsession, both in daily life and in the negotiation of civility, in the sense of laws and their transgression.

one has shown its significance to the text. Second, I look closer at the degree of time precision and its relation to characters and their gender. By making the most prompt characters the most evil, Zola demonizes the modern rationalization of time. I then link these characterizations to the institutions implicitly criticized in the novel.

The novel makes reference to time by a variety of means. The clock is just one of many ways counting is used.<sup>154</sup> The trains themselves, so often included, are known by their times of departure and arrival: “le train de trois heures vingt-cinq,” “l’express de six heures trente” (two examples in the first chapter, once in the second and fifth, for this train that goes from Le Havre to Paris, also called “l’express du Havre”) “le train de quatre heures vingt-cinq, pour Dieppe” (65-66), “l’express de six heures quarante” (included in both the second, third, and fifth chapters), “le train de sept heures vingt-six du matin” (83), “le train de cinq heures” (150), and “le train de onze heures vingt” (243).<sup>155</sup> In addition, omnibuses are discussed in correlation to trains in relation to schedules: “l’omnibus parti de Paris à douze heures quarante cinq” (86), “l’omnibus de cinq heures quarante-cinq” to Rouen and Paris (111), and “l’omnibus de neuf heures cinquante” (115). Characters in the *La Bête humaine* calculate their days with reference to train schedules. Franc Schuerewegen calls *La Bête humaine* “une histoire hyperchronométrée” (129).<sup>156</sup> The sounds of approaching and departing trains replace the sounds (and function) of church bells: “Elle [Séverine] se levait assez tard, heureuse de rester seule au lit, bercée par les départs et les arrivées des trains, qui marquaient pour elle la marche des heures, exactement, ainsi qu’une

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<sup>154</sup> Time is used to establish distances between cities (by train), but space is also used. Train distances are marked by “poteaux” as well as time, and the numbered “poteaux” help establish where bodies are found after crashes and murders. Grandmorin’s body is found at “poteau 153.”

<sup>155</sup> Viti also mentions the use of train times (117).

<sup>156</sup> “Et l’on commence à se dire que l’objet *premier* dans ce roman, celui qui sert de *modèle* à tous les autres, celui qui dicte sa loi à l’univers romanesque, ce n’est peut-être pas la locomotive, ou la machine à vapeur, dont on a tant parlé, mais l’*horloge*, dont la fonction est, étrangement, de dire l’éternel retour des choses” (Schuerewegen 124).

horloge” (189).<sup>157</sup> The train’s whistle also functions as a church bell. Unlike the bell, however, which at its most precise gave the time in quarter hours, the train’s whistle keeps a much more precise time that depends on minutes, because people have memorized the train schedules.<sup>158</sup> Every minute counts, both for those maneuvering the trains and for the characters plotting murder. Characters plan murders and create alibis based on their knowledge of train times, and the judicial system uses clock time (or should we say train time?) to determine a suspect’s guilt or innocence.

This change toward more precise time-keeping represents a larger cultural shift toward time as utility, where wasting time is the ultimate vice. Characters who are precise and on time (like Roubaud, Jacques, and Misard) are valued much more by society than those who lead a more natural daily schedule. “Mais l’essentiel, c’est le principe qui apparaît, la loi que l’on peut dégager, le *cogito* zolien, car il faut bien, de temps en temps, écorcher son Descartes: j’ai l’heure donc je suis” (Schuerewegen 125). Cabuche, for instance, is the only character to laze about the countryside, and he is also the most suspicious. “Vagabonding” is a sin, and not the only one of which Cabuche is accused, but one that triggers suspicion on the part of judicial agents like Denizet. Unaccounted time is not only rare; it is dangerous for characters in need of alibis. When Cabuche asserts that he was asleep by six o’clock the night of Grandmorin’s murder, he has no way to prove it. Jacques, however, can account for all his time because he is employed and tracked by the train system that keeps exhaustive records of employees—“je pouvais donner, heure par heure, l’emploi de mon temps” (356). Ironically, the most precise characters are the most villainous.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Jacques’s Aunt Phasie notes the same phenomenon: “la sensation de la secousse profonde des trains, dont le passage, pour elle, sonnait les heures” (300).

<sup>158</sup> “Tout au long du XIXe siècle progresse le quadrillage du temps individuel” (Corbin 13).

<sup>159</sup> In Chapter Twelve, when Cabuche is unjustly sentenced for life to “[des] travaux forcés,” the narration includes a large number of references to “vérité” that seem quite purposeful, most notably a phrase regarding the false indictment of Cabuche: “Telle était la vérité, l’aveuglante vérité” (363). For any reader fond of Stendhal, this phrase immediately brings to mind the last line of *Le Rouge et le noir*, “L’âpre



While praising the efficiency of trains, *La Bête humaine* almost overwhelmingly casts the societal changes related to time as negative, suggesting that they create men and women who resemble machines more than people. Misard, for instance, is likened to a lifeless automaton whose activities never vary. Misard's job in the small town of Croix-de-Maufras is to change the signals for approaching trains and to "inscrire sur son garde-temps l'heure du passage" (84). Several descriptions assess Misard's robotic existence, and these become more accentuated toward the end of the novel. Initially, Misard's banal routine is summarized in a few lines, without much commentary: "Il rentra, prévint les deux postes, inscrivit le passage, puis attendit. Besogne toujours la même, qu'il faisait pendant douze heures, vivant là, mangeant là, sans lire trois lignes d'un journal, sans paraître même avoir une pensée, sous son crâne oblique" (85). The simplicity of the syntax underlines the monotony of Misard's daily schedule, undisturbed even by murder. After coming to the realization that Misard indeed poisoned his aunt (as she had claimed), Jacques finds him the same as before: "On tuait donc sans secousse, et la vie continuait" (333). This leads Jacques to believe that he will be able to kill without risking too much. As these realizations build, Zola increasingly dehumanizes Misard until he is nothing but a machine bent on murder:

Sûrement, depuis des années, il n'avait pas eu d'autre idée dans la tête, de jour et de nuit, pendant les douze interminables heures de son service. À chaque tintement électrique qui lui annonçait un train, sonner de la trompe; puis, le train passé, la voie fermée, pousser un bouton pour l'annoncer au poste suivant, en pousser un autre pour rendre la voie libre au poste précédent: c'étaient là des *mouvements mécaniques*, qui avaient fini par entrer comme des habitudes de corps

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vérité," which Stendhal falsely attributes to Danton, one of many false citations (Petrey 149). Just as truth has no real referent in *Le Rouge et Le noir*, truth and justice are meaningless in *La Bête humaine*. While it may be more accurate to say that time is on the march in *La Bête humaine* and that nothing can stop it, the search for truth remains fundamental.

dans sa vie *végétative* [...] [...] Rien au-delà: il la tuerait, il chercherait, c'était lui qui aurait l'argent. (332-33; my emphasis)

Note that Zola uses the conditional, even though Misard had already killed Jacques's aunt. This analepsis functions as indirect discourse, giving us access to Misard's thought process. Misard's job does not require any thought; he is just a drone that pushes buttons all day, and then repeats this routine the next day. Zola robotizes his characters in *La Bête humaine*, automating rather than animating. The author consistently compares behavior to that of automatons. Séverine compares Grandmorin's death to "un déroulement d'horloge qu'on a cassée" (254). When Jacques fears he will kill Séverine, he describes his increasing unease as "un grondement de toute la machine" (258). Are characters in this novel nothing more than sophisticated toys, like Jacques de Vaucanson's eighteenth-century humanoid automata? Misard is the most exaggerated case of how modern life has made automatons of us all, but many other characters offer similar portrayals, whether it is the routine of Roubaud's workday or of Jacques's.

Whereas most novels establish a character's routine in the opening chapters as a matter of course, *La Bête humaine* does so in a much more detailed fashion, and emotional crisis is represented by the inability of a character to maintain a strict schedule. For example, Roubaud's morning routine is laid out step by step in the third chapter: "L'horloge marquait huit heures trente-cinq, il n'avait plus de départ avant l'omnibus de neuf heures cinquante. D'ordinaire, il employait cette heure de répit à faire une tournée dans la gare" (115); and "Neuf heures, neuf heures cinq. D'ordinaire, il ne remontait chez lui qu'à dix heures, après le départ du train de neuf heures cinquante, pour déjeuner" (118). There are no gaps of free time in Roubaud's day, except for "un court repos, près d'un quart d'heure" (113). By the novel's end, we as readers can lay out each character's timetable as precisely as Judge Denizet, whose bulging folders related to each suspect remind us of Doctor Pascal's in the eponymous novel (1893). Emphasizing particulars for

each character's routine is especially important to the structure of this novel, as later in the text variations to these routines will reveal a character's unhinging due to emotional distress and fear.

Besides reflecting the *doxa*, specific time expressions heighten dramatic tension in innovative ways. When time slows down, especially before a character commits a murder, Zola accentuates this downward tempo: “*Encore* trois quarts d’heure à tuer!” (161; my emphasis), “comme ce serait long, d’attendre une demi-heure” (345); “*Encore* un quart d’heure” (346; my emphasis). Zola adds temporal expressions to mentions of clock time, insisting on the real time of an event— “depuis un instant” (eight instances), “brusquement” (thirty-four instances), and “tout à l’heure” (twenty-nine instances). More than time as an abstract concept, Zola emphasizes the idea of counting and measuring, the way that modern industrialized life has separated each person's day into units that must be accounted for.<sup>160</sup>

From the outset, time becomes one of the most important girders upon which Zola structures *La Bête humaine*. In the first chapter, references to time become more frequent in the hour before the Roubauds kill Grandmorin and increments of time become smaller, as Table 1.1 shows. When Roubaud makes the decision to kill Grandmorin on the train, his use of a casual expression (“avoir le temps”) takes on a new meaning: “Cinq heures vingt, nous avons le temps” (75). He also repeats the time—five-twenty—to himself twice, as if to rouse himself from the preceding brutal hour in which he beat Séverine for her adulterous relationship with Grandmorin. In *Le Dernier Jour*, such increasing precision heightens dramatic tension, but whereas Hugo could get the reader's attention by repeating the hour and quarter-hour, Zola must go even further by focusing on the minute.

Clock time is used repeatedly in *La Bête humaine* to build suspense in main moments:

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<sup>160</sup> Numbers themselves take on importance, sometimes in surprising ways. For example, the numbers for the train on which Grandmorin is killed (the 608), as well as the number on his watch (2516), and the final train at the novel's end (293), all add up to 14. I am unsure whether the number fourteen has particular significance, since there are twelve chapters. This is a very basic number game that links the three objects—all tied to Grandmorin and to state power. This further supports my argument that Grandmorin is more central to the story than critics have considered.

- Chapter One immediately establishes the key role that time plays in an extremely detailed timetable (see the figure below) leading up to Grandmorin's murder;
- In Chapter Three, Roubaud anxiously awaits the inspection of the express train in Le Havre containing the carriage with Grandmorin's murdered body;
- Chapter Five finds Séverine anxious before meeting to demand clemency from Camy-Lamotte, Grandmorin's friend;
- In Chapter Six, the guilty Roubauds become more punctual than ever out of fear;
- After Séverine recounts the Grandmorin murder to Jacques in Chapter Eight, he almost kills her;
- Chapter Nine shows how Roubaud is becoming distracted in his work and unable to maintain his strict daily schedule;
- Flore waits to kill Séverine and Jacques in Chapter Ten by stopping the train;
- And, finally, in Chapter Eleven, Jacques kills Séverine.

Clock time also plays a minor role in three of the twelve chapters—One (Grandmorin's body is found), Four (Denizet questions witnesses), and seven (a snowstorm stops the Lison). In other words, clock time is central not just to the infamous first chapter,<sup>161</sup> but also to the entire novel's structure. We can further divide the most important episodes involving clock time into two groups: those involving characters *waiting to kill* (Chapters One, Eight, Ten, Eleven) and those involving characters that *have just murdered* (Chapters Three, Five, Six, Nine).

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<sup>161</sup> *La Bête humaine*'s first chapter figures, along with the later tunnel murder, as one of the most analyzed scenes in the novel.

<b>Time</b>	<b>Device</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sense</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>3h20</b>	Cuckoo clock in apartment	Roubaud	Sight	Roubaud awaits Séverine
<b>3h30</b>	Unclear	Roubaud	Sound	The table set, Roubaud waits
<b>4h15</b>	Cuckoo clock	Séverine	Unclear	After the meal, prep for 6h30 train
<b>4h25</b>	Train for Dieppe	The Roubauds	Sight	Couple watches train
<b>5h20</b>	Cuckoo clock	Roubaud	Sight	Roubaud has beaten Séverine
<b>6h15</b>	Unclear	Narrator	Unclear	Le Havre express prepared
<b>6h20</b>	Unclear	Narrator	Unclear	The Roubauds ready for train
<b>6h27</b>	Station clock	Roubaud	Sight	Roubaud awaits departure
<b>6h29</b>	Unclear	Roubaud	Sound (anticipating)	Roubaud awaits departure
<b>6h30</b>	Train	Unclear	Sound	Whistle for departure

Table 2.1 Timetable of Chapter One in Zola's *La Bête humaine*

One way in which the marking of time heightens dramatic tension is by expressing a character's increasing desperation. In the eighth chapter, when Jacques cannot sleep because of his need to kill Séverine who sleeps beside him, his extreme anxiety is expressed in time:

“Chaque fois que le coucou sonnait, Jacques comptait les coups. Quatre heures, cinq heures, six heures. Il aspirait après le jour, il espérait que l'aube chasserait ce cauchemar” (258). Note that

the homonym “coups” here signifies clock strokes, but also suggests a more violent meaning—the violent blow Jacques wishes to give to Séverine—and the homophone “cou,” the exact place on her body he wishes to strike. In the tenth chapter, when Flore plots Jacques and Séverine’s death, she organizes her actions in terms of time. That night, she roams, much like Jacques did: “Une heure dix-huit... Encore sept heures. Ce matin, à huit heures seize, ils passeront” (300). Each Friday, Séverine takes the train to Paris (on a bogus trip, à la Madame Bovary) to be with Jacques. As Flore awaits this night in order to kill Séverine out of murderous jealousy, the expression “encore” is used several more times—“encore quelques minutes” (303), “Encore cinq heures” (304), “Encore deux heures” (306), “encore deux minutes, encore une, elle allait partir, elle partait” (307). The last expression is poetic in the parallelism between the measurement of time and the use of the imperfect, as well as in the movement between temporality and movement. Flore also evaluates the murder in terms of time: “Vingt minutes pour faire le travail” (305). Likening a murder to “le travail” is not just an example of slang, but also suggests that killing a human being is no different from any other daily chore, thus dehumanizing the crime.

Roubaud and Séverine lack Flore’s stoic character, and their descent into a daily hell after Grandmorin’s murder is just one of many examples of the terrible psychological consequences of murder. As in *Thérèse Raquin*, the guilty couple gradually loses control of time as fear and guilt overwhelm them. First, Roubaud’s usual routine is thrown off by his fearful wait for the discovery of Grandmorin’s body in the train wagon. This dislocation is manifest most clearly in Roubaud’s nervous facial tic (a device also used in *Thérèse Raquin*) and the fact that he surprises his employees by speaking more openly than normal. Clock time is noted with considerable frequency, decreasing to almost five-minute increments as the tension increases. As the investigation continues and Jacques backs up the Roubauds’s alibi, they settle back into daily life with increasing unease. At first comforted by their regimented existence, the Roubauds’s subsequently lose the ability to follow their rigorous, emotionless schedule. One month has

passed, and the couple is “soumis à une existence d’horloge par l’uniforme retour des heures réglementaires” (187). The use of the verb “soumettre” implies the now sinister way time is disciplining the couple, since they wish to remain unsuspected. Roubaud works industriously to prove himself beyond reproach at his employment: “Jamais Roubaud ne s’était montré un employé si exact, si consciencieux: la semaine de jour, descendu sur le quai à cinq heures du matin, il ne remontait déjeuner qu’à dix, redescendait à onze, allait jusqu’à cinq heures du soir, onze heures pleines de service” (189). With a simplified syntax, Zola demonstrates Roubaud’s temporal rigor, but also portrays his routine as a kind of sentence and penance. Before, Roubaud delightfully submitted to the constraints of his strict schedule, but now he has a difficult time fulfilling the simplest of obligations. For her part, the normally lazy Séverine throws herself into housekeeping with renewed vigor. However, daily routines soon start to break down for both her and Roubaud. Their unease begins with their increasing superstition regarding the hole in their living room floor where they hid Grandmorin’s watch and money.<sup>162</sup> Troubled by this lingering sign of Grandmorin’s murder, Roubaud and Séverine have trouble sleeping. Roubaud takes to walking around the train depot outside his normal hours, and he has to start using an alarm clock in order to get to work on time. The only thing keeping Roubaud together is the force of habit, but more and more he seeks escape through drink and cards, likened by the narration to a “gangrène morale” (273).<sup>163</sup> As Roubaud becomes addicted to gambling, his work begins to suffer, and “des trous se produisaient” (267), causing him to be late for work. Because of one such absence, a train is an inexcusable hour late, and Roubaud’s superiors begin to think of him as unreliable. Through Zola’s minute examination of the manner in which the Roubaud’s fixed routines become

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<sup>162</sup> In her analysis of jewelry in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Danielle Kent Bishop writes of how Grandmorin’s watch ties together the destinies of four other characters—Jacques, Roubaud, Séverine and Cabuche (see 115-16).

<sup>163</sup> We find a similar pattern with Thérèse and Laurent in *Thérèse Raquin*, but *La Bête humaine* substitutes gambling for painting. Zola examined the dangers of gambling at length in one of his first works, *Les Mystères de Marseilles* (1867). However, the protagonist, the very Zolian Marius Cayol, is able to avoid the abject end that awaits Roubaud.

unhinged, the author anticipates the lack of control that will spread to the entire country in the novel's culminating scene of a runaway train.

Even someone like Flore is unable to sustain her ability to manipulate time to her own ends, and the only solution that remains to her is suicide. As with Roubaud and Séverine, Zola uses her to illustrate the difficulty in mastering time and space in criminal acts. In the minutes before throwing herself in front of the train from Paris, Flore loses all sense of time and space, just as Roubaud and Séverine lose their way and their ability to negotiate a daily schedule. Flore keeps herself together until she realizes that she has killed fifteen people (and critically injured thirty-two others) without touching a hair on Séverine's or Jacques's head—a realization that leads her toward suicide. While she cannot control the death of Jacques and Séverine, she does control her own.

Zola's novel suggests that notwithstanding a certain progress and centralization, machines will always command humans, and that within the human is the "beast," a blend of heredity and the residue of all of man's history. Modernity forces people's paths to cross in unanticipated ways and has unanticipated effects, such as murder. The plot follows the investigation of a murder that will "derail" the political and judicial system, controlled by a corrupt class. Since the publication of *La Bête humaine*, people have gone on to write and film stories showing that good things can happen on trains as well—Proust's train to Combray and Balbec, and David Lean's film *Brief Encounter* (1945), to name but a few examples.<sup>164</sup> Far more important than the train theme, however, is the way that Zola portrays state corruption, and this is perhaps the reason that he insisted that the train system serve only as a "cadre." Zola's real focus is on the nexus of sexual crimes that eventually have the potential to bring about the collapse of

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<sup>164</sup> Baroli states that train workers were horrified at how Zola depicted their "milieu," and many, including those who helped provide him with documentation, had hoped he would show the poor treatment of rail workers as he had done for mine workers in *Germinal*. However, Zola did not wish to make another *Germinal*, and so avoided this aspect of the rail system, much to the chagrin of French "cheminots" (264).



parts of government (Grandmorin's crimes), but whose erasure results in a continuance of state corruption, leading to the disaster that will be the Franco-Prussian war, as the novel's ending scene suggests. As we reveal in the following chapters, Zola's blending of politics, crime, and sexual abuse in order to out truth proved to be a formula that Maupassant and Mirbeau would emulate.

## Chapter 4

### Crime and Sexual Violence in Maupassant's Short Stories

The myth of Maupassant “le bonhomme,” shared in earlier decades by critics (though now largely discarded), has been maintained for the general public, as a recent effort by the French television network France 2 attests. From 2007 through 2009, France 2 showed a series of adaptations of Maupassant’s short stories limited to those texts that would appeal to the public’s already developed sense of what a Maupassant story should represent. Entitled “Chez Maupassant,” this series covered two seasons (2007 and 2008), adapting the following stories in 2008: “Le Rosier de Madame Husson” (1887), “L’ami Joseph” (1883), “Aux champs” (1882), “Le Petit Fût” (1884), “Le Cochon de Morin” (1882), “Une Soirée” (1883), “La Chambre 11” (1884), and “Au bord du lit” (1883).<sup>165</sup> None of the renditions incorporates more serious storylines related to sexual violence or perversion, thus ignoring a critical element of Maupassant’s narratives.<sup>166</sup> By focusing on Maupassant’s lighter tales, the television version neglects the cadence that the author created in his published collections between the tragic and the comic.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Network websites maintain information about these past airings, and on each web site, a light song is paired with images that, for the most part, focus on friendship and family relationships (“Chez Maupassant: Contes et Nouvelles”).

<sup>166</sup> 2007 included the following: “Miss Harriet” (1883), “Toine” (1885), “Le Père Amable” (1886), “Hautot Père et fils” (1889), “Deux amis” (1882), “L’héritage” (1884), “La Parure” (1884), and “Histoire d’une fille de ferme” (1889) (“Chez Maupassant: Deuxième Saison”). For 2010, the series has been expanded to other writers of the short story, as reflected in the title: “Au Siècle de Maupassant: Contes et nouvelles du XIXe siècle.”

<sup>167</sup> “Cette alternance, déconcerte par les ruptures qu’elle crée, souffle le chaud et le froid des registres mêlés – de l’horreur des textes qui relatent des actes criminels aux contes égrillard – et provoque un sentiment d’étrangeté dans l’esprit du lecteur qui va dans le sens d’une vision chaotique. Le mélange des

Along with Zola, Maupassant remains one of the most translated and adapted French authors, and both (unlike Mirbeau) have been canonized by Gallimard's Pléiade collection (Zola in 1963, one year before Hugo, and Maupassant, for his short stories, in 1974). The Belle Époque was the period par excellence of the short story in France, and Maupassant is one of the most prolific short story writers of all time, producing over three hundred "contes et nouvelles," published in newspapers and then in several collections (see Forestier 1749-53 for a complete list). Maupassant arranged many of the initial editions, including *La Maison Tellier* (1881), the *Contes de la Bécasse* (1883), and the *Contes du jour et de la nuit* (1885), but I examine closely here one of the more recent collections, *Contes cruels et fantastiques* (2004). Emmanuèle Grandadam's recent work attests to the importance of taking into consideration Maupassant's original organization.

Maupassant regrouped older and newer texts in a specific order to alternate between the tragic and the comic. For example, the eponymous collection containing "La Petite Roque," unlike Maupassant's usual method, contains simply his most recent stories in the months preceding publication, from December 1885 to April 1886 ("La Petite Roque," "L'Épave," "L'Ermite," "Mademoiselle Perle," "Rosalie Prudent," "Sauvée," "Sur les chats," "Madame Parisse," "Julie Romain," "Le Père aimable"). However, Grandadam shows through Maupassant's correspondence that he in fact planned the inclusion of this short story in a compendium prior to its initial newspaper publication. None of the stories in *La Petite Roque* was published before December 18, 1885, the date of the first included short story by the same name.<sup>168</sup> For Grandadam, sensual desire is the prevailing theme of the collection: "tous [les protagonistes] sont l'objet de désirs sensuels dont le recueil se plaira à explorer les manifestations

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tons ajoute donc un effet de confusion au recueil des désordres de l'amour. Les registres, disparates et dissonants, miment l'incohérence au cœur de la vie, l'effrayante pagaille qui suscite le désir amoureux et les monstres qu'il enfante" (Grandadam 160).

<sup>168</sup> Grandadam's remarkable study contests simplistic claims like the following from Marie-Claire Bancquart: "[Les recueils] sont publiés, tout simplement, quand le nombre de récits inédits semble suffisant pour former un volume. On donne au recueil le titre du récit le plus alléchant" (9).

et surtout les conséquences. [...] [D]ans les différents textes, l'après du désir, ses ravages, le combat physique qu'il suscite ou le poison qu'il distille dans la vie des acteurs, constitue la part la plus importante de l'investigation narrative" (139). While the overall tone may be deathly desire, Grandadam insists that the most negative and serious stories are interspersed with lighter tales in order to surprise the reader, as well as to show that "l'aliénation au désir emprunte donc des voix très diverses, tantôt tragique, tantôt comique" (147). The proof that Maupassant intended such a mixing of genres lies in the differences between the chronological order in which the stories were written in contrast with their arrangement in the published edition (see Grandadam 160).

Likened to a French Chekhov, Maupassant is associated with the short story more than any genre, despite his many examples of novels, travel writing, and journalism.<sup>169</sup> Most studies concentrate on the "cadre" in Maupassant's fiction (the role of the intradiegetic narrator), on the genre of his fiction ("contes" or "nouvelles"?), or on his adherence (or not) to naturalist doctrine.<sup>170</sup> While many of Maupassant's stories begin by way of an intradiegetic narrator, with a group of gentlemen seated around a fire, such a selection leaves out many of Maupassant's more violent stories, such as "La Petite Roque," in which the narrator is far more removed, a trait much more entwined with naturalist poetics.

Several of Maupassant's stories focus on personal violence, whether it is abuse or

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<sup>169</sup> Moreover, few critical studies of Maupassant treat his hundreds of short stories as a whole. Greimas famously dissected "Deux amis" in a series of chapters that he likened to formalist exercises. Critics have privileged particular stories, most notably "Le Horla" (1886) which has received the most critical attention of any one text, except for "Boule de suif" (1880). The MLA database comes up with sixteen critical works treating "Boule de suif" since 1981, while "La Petite Roque" has only received three. Bancquart explains the dearth of work on Maupassant's short fiction by the fact that short stories were considered a minor genre until quite recently (7-9).

<sup>170</sup> Scholars have often read Maupassant's stories (particularly those with narrators who share life stories with Maupassant) as autobiographies, painting him as a boisterous rower and chaser of women. A prolific number of works (including *Maupassant Le Bel-Ami*) explain Maupassant by referring to textual "evidence" for his "pessimistic vision, misogynist attitude and sexual proclivities" (Lethbridge 187). For Lethbridge, few resist "the simplistic conflation of literature with a personal reality" (187). The introduction to the recent collection studied here, *Contes cruels et fantastiques*, unfortunately takes up again the elision of writer and content.

murder.<sup>171</sup> Myriam Tsikounas concentrates on the theme of crime in Maupassant's works, though only in texts related to the countryside (the *Contes normands*), but still finds that these account for forty-nine short stories, or one-eighth of Maupassant's works that appeared between 1881 and 1889 (400). Tsikounas analyzes the *Contes normands* from a variety of angles: differentiating between publication in *Le Gaulois* or *Le Gil-Blas*—this last “rapporte presque exclusivement des agressions liées à la sexualité” (400), considering the tales as they move chronologically (toward the fantastic), and, finally, viewing the stories as one large text. An additional angle is most important for this study—the link to the *boureaux/victimes* topos. Tsikounas points out that of thirty or so stories whose titles concern one or the other, women are not the only victims—“le danger ne guette pas uniquement les femmes” (405)—but I would nuance this view by adding that women and girls alike are almost exclusively sexual victims, in contrast to male characters. In addition, it is important to make the distinction between adult victims and children as targets, rather than use the umbrella term “women,” since it is children rather than adults that are the primary targets of assault.

The following table includes some of the stories from this collection that focus on victims of violence. While not exhaustive by any means, this categorization demonstrates the preponderant role of children as victims.<sup>172</sup> As we have already seen in Zola, young victims serve as a way to dramatize the loss of innocence.

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<sup>171</sup> Marie Anne Zouaghi-Keime notes that there are over thirty murders alone in Maupassant's fiction. In these many deadly tales, Maupassant focuses on the perpetrator of the crime more closely than the victim. The criminal act itself becomes a narrative point of rupture: “Dans tous ces récits le crime apparaît comme une rupture qui introduit la discontinuité dans la vie du personnage: il y a un avant et un après le crime” (Zouaghi-Keime 103). The author uses narrative elements such as internal focalization in order to give the reader access to a criminal's thoughts. Although Zouaghi-Keime shows how Maupassant revitalizes the theme of crime through his treatment of man's fragility, she—like other critics—neglects the importance of space, time, and gender in these criminal tales.

<sup>172</sup> Children are not uniquely victims in Maupassant's short stories. In some cases, children can even serve as perpetrators of crimes. In “L'Orphelin” (1883), Maupassant describes the “criminel-né,” who, once grown, kills his mother in order to inherit her wealth. His stealth saves him and the murder remains unsolved, since the people in his community (as well as state agents) do not suspect that such a good son could commit such an act. “L'Orphelin” illustrates Maupassant's most persistent theme—the deception of

Victims	Children	“Moiron,” “Mme Baptiste,” “La Petite Roque,” “Châli,” “M. Parent,” “Sur l’eau,” “Un parricide,” “La mère aux monstres,” “L’enfant,” “La confession,” “Un fou”
	Animals	Horses (“Fou?”), Birds (“Fou”), Dogs (“Mlle Cocotte”), Donkeys (“L’âne”)

Table 3-1 Victims in Maupassant’s *Contes cruels et fantastiques* (2004)

Sexual violence occurs in several short stories, most notably “Madame Baptiste” and “La Petite Roque.” We can also include stories like “Châli,” where relationships with children as young as eight are eroticized. In “Madame Baptiste,” rape is used as a form of public revenge, far different from its private aspect in other stories. My interest lies in the fact that rape is at the center of the story. The tale begins with a narrative summation informing the reader that a man rapes a young girl of eleven repeatedly over a period of three months in her village. We never learn her first name, except that she is “la petite Fontanelle.” The rape is not described as having any effect on the girl except to shame her publicly.

After being raped, the Fontanelle girl is seen as having “plus rien à apprendre,” and this loss of innocence triggers a loss of social standing. Later she marries a local bureaucrat, and her eventual pregnancy is depicted as a kind of social purification that erases the dishonorable past. During a public event, nonetheless, members of the local community seek to humiliate her husband by repeatedly calling her “Madame Baptiste,” Baptiste being the name of her rapist.<sup>173</sup>

This title draws attention to Maupassant’s emphasis on the public aspect of the Fontanelle girl’s

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appearances. More often than not, however, children in Maupassant are among the deceived.

<sup>173</sup> Vigarello chronologically situates the communal appropriations of rape as belonging to the conception of the crime prior to modern times. “Madame Baptiste” illustrates how the ramifications of rape within a community (in terms of shame) endure in literature.

past rape. I would also underline the central role of naming in this story, a factor that will be equally important in “La Petite Roque” and that holds for all of the texts examined in this study. The girl of “Madame Baptiste” is known by her surname—her father’s name—and then heckled with her rapist’s first name. Never does she acquire her own personal identity. Instead, her identity is constructed in terms of her relationships to men.

“La Petite Roque,” which has been studied far more than other stories of sexual violence in Maupassant, stands apart from them in terms of its critical examination of the judicial process. It depicts the violent rape and murder of a young peasant girl, for whom the short story is named, and the justice that she eventually receives, though posthumously. Maupassant illustrates state corruption through the mishandling of the murder investigation. The death of a young poor girl is not a top priority for the government (as the text indicates), but Maupassant makes up for Louise’s invisibility through two supernatural means that continually evokes Louise’s death and that constitute a poetics of rape in the text. Even though “La Petite Roque” has not been entirely overlooked<sup>174</sup>—we have but to read the well-known treatment by Mitterand or Targe<sup>175</sup>—certain aspects of the short story have been neglected, such as the relation between gendered crime and space.<sup>176</sup>

First, since the state is blinded by class (and gender) in matters of justice, Maupassant calls on imminent justice in the form of hallucinations that accost Louise’s killer, none other than the town mayor. In an unjust world where money and family determine the power hierarchy, and in which marginalized figures are guilty in advance, the only possible justice is rendered by

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<sup>174</sup> Even the current President of the Republic and his wife were said to have included “La Petite Roque” and “Le Horla” in their summer reading (Meeus and Montalembert).

<sup>175</sup> While both Mitterand and Targe emphasize the importance of space in “La Petite Roque,” and Targe goes into some detail, neither critic keeps gender in mind in his analysis.

<sup>176</sup> Significant work has been done on space in Maupassant’s novels (Giacchetti), as well as classic studies, like that of Castella. In studying Maupassant’s *Contes normands*, Tsikounas concentrates on how spatio-temporal constructions are central to Maupassant: “D’un récit à l’autre, Guy de Maupassant rappelle que les drames paysans ont leur géographie, leurs heures et leurs saisons” (404). Moreover, for Tsikounas, certain spatial aspects are “les véritables coupables” of violence, with climate descriptions usually accompanying violent acts.

nature or the subconscious.<sup>177</sup> I examine the STC of the ghostly visits Louise pays to Renardet. Second, I study the STC of the grove where Louise was murdered. Drawing on my spatio-temporal model from Chapter One, I demonstrate the important role of “evocation” in “La Petite Roque.” On three separate occasions, Maupassant uses the murder site to make important points. First, I show how the discovery of the body at the murder site establishes a direct critique of the judicial process and bureaucracy. Next, I concentrate on the character Renardet’s recollection of the crime and his gradual fall into insanity, upon which Louise’s ghost haunts him.<sup>178</sup> Lastly, his solution, to cut down the trees in the grove, is likened to a rape of the forest. The anthropomorphism of the grove is another essential evocation of Louise’s murder, in addition to her ghost’s apparitions and the initial discovery of her corpse. By situating the rape in the grove, Maupassant reinforces the perception that such acts occur outside the home.<sup>179</sup>

Like Maupassant’s other short stories, “La Petite Roque” depicts sexual criminals as community members, rather than outsiders, who are acquainted with their victims—a narrative choice that counters the stereotypical marginalization of criminals, which continues to prevail in our era. Moreover, he underlines early in the text when the body is first found by a passerby that such a heinous crime is highly unusual, “Et puis c’était chose si rare dans le pays, un meurtre, et le meurtre d’une enfant encore, qu’il n’en pouvait croire ses yeux” (619). While Maupassant

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<sup>177</sup> Clearly Maupassant owes a great deal to Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*, in which a murderous couple suffers from hallucinations. After their marriage, Laurent and Thérèse’s agony is first confined to their nights, and then merges into the daylight until there is no respite from suffering. Gradually, Thérèse and Laurent seek an “ending” more and more desperately, while at the same time their daily lives lose all structure, first through an abandonment to vice and then to an abject lassitude that evolves into domestic violence. Eventually, they try to find peace through their parallel plans to kill each other. However, their mutual plans backfire, since they pick the exact same moment to turn on each other. Shocked by the mutual recognition of their own intentions, unable to move beyond their own narrative, they commit suicide together.

<sup>178</sup> For Louis Forestier, Maupassant’s most esteemed critic, certain characteristics of “La Petite Roque” rival and even announce themes in “Le Horla”: “Cette présence de l’inconnu, animant les objets familiers, annonce les données les plus captivantes du *Horla*” (1523).

<sup>179</sup> “Antirape activists have often criticized the false demarcation between an inside and outside of rape in terms of geographical space: rape culture spawns spatial contradictions by warning women not to go outside because of possible rape, but most rapes occur inside women’s homes” (Marcus 399).



disrupts certain norms, he reinforces others, especially those of gender and sexual violence.<sup>180</sup>

The reader's awareness of such norms creates dramatic suspense—that of recognizing signs of possible sexual danger for a female character. Even if Maupassant shows that a sexual predator can come from any social class or be an acquaintance of the victim, he underscores the portrayal of women and girls as rapable subjects.<sup>181</sup> Critics reinforce these norms, when sexual violence is taken as a natural part of daily life. In his critical edition of Maupassant's *Contes et nouvelles*, Forestier dismisses the sexual violence in “La Petite Roque” by pointing out its banality: “La donnée: le viol et l’assassinat d’une enfant, n’est pas loin du commun” (1518). In fact Forestier adopts a similarly dismissive tone with respect to other rapes in Maupassant's stories, which minimizes the violent nature of sexual assault. For example, he divides these stories by rape that is “inconsciemment désiré” (1518) and that results from a female character's “désir du viol” (1167). Although rape is possibly a sexual fantasy for both men and women, I would argue that Forestier is talking about representations of rape that are “real” in the stories and not fantasies. It is in this respect that referring to rape as “sensuality” or “love” deemphasizes the criminal aspects. I understand the critic's need to use synonyms for stylistic purposes, but we must be very careful not to adopt a misogynist tone that normalizes rape just for the sake of stylistics.

### “La Petite Roque”

“La Petite Roque” is separated into two parts. Initially, we witness the discovery of the dead girl's body, followed by the judicial proceedings of the small town of Roüy-le-Tors and the

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<sup>180</sup> This ambiguity is not lost on his critics. As Suwala concludes, “Rien n’est jamais simple avec Maupassant, et aucune réponse ne peut jamais être catégorique” (251).

<sup>181</sup> Vigarello elaborates on the new statute of the criminal's relation to the victim in Belle Époque literature: “Cette liaison trouble entre l’insupportable et le normal est accentuée encore par un constat fréquemment issu des enquêtes et des recensements de la fin du siècle: l’accusé serait un criminel ‘proche’, surtout l’agresseur d’enfant; parent ou voisin, il connaît sa victime et peut plus aisément l’attaquer” (222). For Vigarello, part of the complexity of this blending of the “average person” with intolerable cruelty comes from the increasing view that pleasure is a right.

ruling of the “case” as unresolved. In this section, Maupassant puts into question scientific advances, including the objectivity and lack of empathy of agents investigating the crime. In the second part of the text, the internal narration follows the point of view of the murderer, none other than Joseph Renardet, the mayor of Roüy-le-Tors.<sup>182</sup> Renardet plays a central role in the judicial process described in the first half of the story. In this section of the story, Maupassant gives the reader access to the thoughts of numerous characters. In the second part of the story, Maupassant uses free indirect discourse again, this time chiefly for Renardet. Far from feeling guilty, Renardet nimbly acts the part in order to escape all punishment. However, he soon begins to lose his mind, haunted by the image of the girl’s cadaver that seems to approach his window each night from the nearby crime site, the grove near his property. He finishes by committing suicide, but not before trying to escape imminent punishment in every way possible.

The initial discovery and handling of Louise’s body serves as a denunciation of French judiciary system. Maupassant contrasts the corrupt ruling class (including state representatives and doctors)<sup>183</sup> with the lower classes, including a few uncorrupted agents of the Republic. None of the state protagonists in “La Petite Roque” is depicted in a positive light except for the mailman. As Mitterand remarks, Maupassant’s story shows an “opposition social immuable” between those who hold power—”une alliance immédiate entre propriétaires, représentants du

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<sup>182</sup> Forestier cites possible real life inspirations such as Louis Ménesclou, known as “le monstre de Grenelle.” Like the girl in “La Petite Roque,” Ménesclou’s victim was named Louise, and her mother had asked people, including her killer, if they had seen her, as she had not returned home the previous night (see Bataille 133-49). The real Louise, too, was strangled because she would not stop crying. Unlike Maupassant’s Renardet, Ménesclou was an unemployed, poor man of twenty years, living with his parents in Paris, who groomed Louise for assault by gradually befriending her and getting her until she came alone to his apartment. He raped and then strangled her, after which he cut her body into pieces and fed it to the hearth, an act during which the police arrived. Ménesclou’s victim was four years old, much younger than the girl in “La Petite Roque.” By making the victim much older, Maupassant creates ambiguity regarding her possible sexuality. Due to the target’s young age, Maupassant and Zola can play with notions of sexuality, while subtly undercutting the notion of fighting back. In this way, not only do both writers feminize the victims of sexual violence, they also infantilize them.

<sup>183</sup> “Doctors are never, for Maupassant, who had considerable first-hand of their work, the heroic figures they are for Zola” (Patrick 24). Maupassant often shows how social entitlement protects high-ranking members of society. In “Fou” (1886), a judge leaves a note after his death recounting his life’s fascination with the act of murder, leading him to kill a small boy in a park.

pouvoir et prêtres” (116)—and those without power. Today we would say that a certain amount of emotional detachment is necessary for people such as doctors and policemen to do their very difficult jobs, to deal with death and crime on a daily basis. However, Maupassant demonstrates that those that abuse their rank can take professionalism to an extreme.

The humble postman Médéric, the first to discover the body and the only good guy in the story, overcomes his distress having seen a dead girl and tries not to touch anything, fearful of troubling the criminal inquest: “Alors elle était morte; et il se trouvait en présence d’un crime” (619).<sup>184</sup> When the postman first comes upon the corpse, he states the facts plainly: “un corps d’enfant, tout nu, sur la mousse [...] Elle avait les bras ouverts, les jambes écartées, la face couverte d’un mouchoir. Un peu de sang maculait de ses cuisses” (619). The unembellished narration echoes the character’s persona, in keeping with the postman’s serviceable demeanor. Médéric thinks better of removing the handkerchief covering the body’s face in order to identify her, which he feels he confidently can do since he knows everyone in the “contrée” (620). As he wrestles with whether he has the right to disturb the corpse, he frames this internal battle in judicial terms, reflecting the reach of French law: “Avait-il le droit de déranger quelque chose à l’état du cadavre avant les constatations de la justice?” (620). The reader was already prepared for his trepidation, since the postman had decided to take the two children’s toys that he found prior to seeing the corpse to the Mayor’s house, showing his respect for social order. His professional and appropriate gaze and behavior contrasts with that of other bourgeois state agents who promptly arrive—Renardet the mayor, the rural policeman, the Mayor’s secretary, and the local physician. Their examination of the body is driven by their destructive male desire.

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<sup>184</sup> “Et c’est ce sinistre messenger qui trouve les corps, au petit matin, durant sa tournée toujours attentivement minutée, et va alerter les autorités pour faire entrer le délit dans l’espace judiciaire” (Tsikounas 406). If, as Tsikounas states, the postman in “La Petite Roque” symbolizes modernity in terms of spatial mobility and a precise attention to time that is chronometric in nature, this raises the question: does he constitute a positive or negative view of the rationalization of time and space? Since the postman does not prevent Louise’s death, I would say not.

Maupassant's short story criticizes the objectivity of many groups of social agents, underlining subjective and corrupt aspects of their loyalty to each other. The scene of their arrival at the murder site is particularly revealing, both for the lack of emotion shown and the eroticization of the dead girl's body. The voyeurism of these privileged men is allowed, while that of the crowd is punished. The men share a cigar as they watch "une grosse mouche" brush against the naked corpse, leading them to wonder about the female fashion craze of putting "les mouches" on the face. The cold objectivity of these men is criticized implicitly. For example, the doctor puts on "un pince-nez comme lorsqu'on regarde un objet curieux" and states without emotion, "Viol et assassinat que nous allons constater tout à l'heure" (623). The male gaze rationalizes itself here in contradictory ways. These agents of power can look at a cadaver without shame, lingering over aspects of female anatomy, because the body has become a simple object, to be classified and viewed.<sup>185</sup> The doctor continues, describing the murder as an "affaire" with a light tone, peppering his speech with expressions like "très bien" as he does his job and noting particular anatomical traits: "Cette fillette est d'ailleurs presque une femme, voyez sa gorge" (623). The use of the imperative not only underscores the immediacy of the scene, but also exemplifies how Louise's body is left naked and eroticized.

When Louise's mother arrives, Maupassant juxtaposes the coldness of the state officials with her raw emotion in front of her naked daughter's mutilated body. It is the mother that gives us the victim's first name. "La petite Roque" becomes "ma petite Louise," the possessive adjective connoting the family to which she belongs and her place in a personal history. Up to this point, she has mostly been designated by her family name, "la petite Roque" (621 and 623) or by her now dead body—"un corps d'enfant," "le cadavre," or finally as "la petite fille" or "la fillette"

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<sup>185</sup> Jonathan Eburne's comments on the male gaze in Maigritte's painting, "L'Assassin menacé" (1926) are in keeping with my reading of Maupassant's scene: "In Maigritte's well-known painting the blank gazes of the male figures surrounding the female corpse at the center of the canvas demand an investigation into the unspoken meanings of these gazes: Does their lack of affect suggest complicity, an erasure of the distinction between murderer and policeman, criminal and viewer?" (40).

(619). During the examination of her body by the town's political agents, for example, she is most often referred to as "le cadavre." Her mother then lifts the handkerchief with which state officials had covered her face, preferring to avoid the dead girl's gaze in order to linger more amply over her naked body with their roving eyes. The mother's humanization of the cadaver only reinforces the coldness of the men in power and their dehumanizing gaze.

The doctor designates a culprit quickly, at the same time working in a critique of the République. He observes that while theoretically anyone is "capable de ça" (I would underline the use of an abstract noun for the atrocious act), that the criminal "doit être quelque rôdeur, quelque ouvrier sans travail," and that ever since "nous sommes en République, on ne rencontre que ça sur les routes" (1024). The repetition of the demonstrative pronoun "ça" is worth noting, because it designates both the murder and vagabonds in less than a few sentences, thus conflating the two, just as state law links lawlessness to vagrancy, without any real justification aside from old fears (see Smith). Maupassant draws attention to this false link between "vagabonds" and crime. The doctor builds on his previous statement by including class: "N'ayant ni bon souper ni bon gîte, il s'est procuré le reste. On ne sait pas ce qu'il y a d'hommes sur la terre capable d'un forfait à un moment donné" (1025). In this way, the doctor's assertion shows the danger of relying solely on the role the environment plays in shaping an individual. Renardet's reaction resounds all the more ironically if we take into account his probable guilt even early in the story: "Oui, ça ne peut être qu'un étranger, un passant, un vagabond sans feu ni lieu..." (1025). This response is repeated in a later scene, echoing the social hypocrisy of state agents. Renardet is speaking to the prosecuting judge at home about possible suspects while he shaves his face. Renardet looks in the mirror and names himself as the first logical suspect, given his physical proximity to the crime, and this elicits nothing but a guffaw from the judge. He then offers a list of possible culprits, all "sans feu ni lieu"—"un braconnier nommé Cavalle, un pêcheur de truites et d'écrevisses nommé Pacquet,

et un piqueur de bœufs nommé Clovis” (1032). All government representatives in the story take it for granted that the guilty party is from the lowest social classes and homeless.

When the judge and police arrive at the crime scene (the grove), the implicit criticism of the justice system becomes more explicit. The only explanation given for the crime is “un vol,” though this is then seen as an untenable explanation, since Louise was wearing little more than rags worth nothing. The judge takes evident pleasure in the enigma of the crime, admiring the murderer: “Ce crime a été commis ou par une brute ou par un madré coquin. Dans tous les cas, nous arriverons bien à le découvrir” (1029). Last on the scene, the priest tries to comfort the mother, but even this one sign of emotion is compromised by the fact that Renardet simultaneously invites the priest to lunch at his house. The priest’s role is represented as a formality, as part of his job, rather than a product of emotional truth.

The narration takes into account not only this authoritarian male gaze, but also the crowd of curious onlookers who all come running once the cops and the prosecuting judge have arrived. The crowd’s gaze is described in terms similar to the diagnosing doctor. Like the doctor, the crowd “palpe” the girl’s body with their eyes. Just as the authorities devour Louise’s form with remarks on her emerging femininity, the young men in the crowd have “des yeux avides [...] qui fouillaient ce jeune corps découvert” (1027). This gaze constitutes a second rape of Louise’s body. Curiously, Renardet is angered by the crowd’s avidity and covers Louise with his own jacket. He menaces the crowd, threatening to beat anyone up “comme un chien” (1027) if they dare approach the corpse. Given what we learn later of Renardet’s role in Louise’s death, his possessive reaction is hard to judge. The narrator reiterates Renardet’s violence, remarking that “[l]es paysans avaient grand’peur de lui; il se tinrent au large” (1027). These statements serve to underline the probable guilt of Renardet as well as to offer a view into the relationship between the dead and the living in *Belle Époque* France. The scene reminds us of the access everyday people had to dead bodies at this time, and how staring at cadavers could be a form of

entertainment.<sup>186</sup> The villagers observe Louise's body with detached interest in a similar fashion to visitors of a morgue. Such a description serves to show the crowd as "sexually degenerate" (Pick 4), the criminal behavior of an individual projected onto the throng.

All of the authorities retained by the murder come together at Renardet's house for a lunchtime meal to discuss the crime. The juxtaposition of lunch with such an atrocious crime goes one step beyond apathy and implies a denunciation of the state. Meals are often used as examples of daily activity that make dreadful acts banal. Previously, we saw in *Le Dernier Jour* how Hugo draws on the same parallelism of daily routines coupled with the condemned narrator's horror to attack the institutionalization of the death penalty, alerting the reader to the danger of making the shocking an everyday event through the bureaucracy surrounding crime.<sup>187</sup> Hugo provides a textual forerunner in his first preface to *Le Dernier Jour* by comparing the judges and their dining interests to legal cannibals (see Grossman 115). Seemingly nothing can shake the daily ritual of meals, and this is meant to shock the reader and to act as a consciousness-raising technique. Many writers who rely on third-person narrators use such parallelism to suggest critiques, but we especially find writers concerned with social justice and realism, from Hugo to Mirbeau, putting to use this strategy, naturalist narratives in particular. In Zola's *Germinal*, the bourgeois mine owners casually discuss the poverty of miners, all the while consuming a particularly succulent meal, described in exaggerated terms.

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<sup>186</sup> As Vanessa Schwartz has observed, the Paris morgue was a popular destination for tourists and Parisians alike. She links the role of the press in sensationalizing reality through the "fait divers" to the morgue's need to sensationalize dead bodies, going so far as to prolong the possibility of viewing a decaying body by replacing decomposed areas with wax. Zola includes a morgue visit in *Thérèse Raquin* when Laurent goes to view Camille's body.

<sup>187</sup> When Balzac deploys a similar juxtaposition in "Le Couteau à papier," Caroline de Mulder sees it as an example of parody: "Détails macabres et érotiques alternent dans la description de la victime, une femme nue, renversée, offerte, les cheveux tombant jusqu'au sol, etc. Chez Balzac qui parodie Janin, l'autopsie est d'ailleurs significativement suivie 'd'un déjeuner de garçons': du spectacle des tronçons de corps de femme 'généralement blancs comme la neige,' on passe quasiment sans transition à celui d'une 'tranche de jambon' sur un morceau de pain et à celui d'un ample pâté de foie gras'" (412). Rather than (or in addition to) parody, I would argue that such a juxtaposition denounces the dehumanization of the female corpse.

State corruption can be seen even before the murder investigation begins, since Renardet is excluded from the list of possible suspects, given his social stature in the community and despite his surly character, which might suggest potential violence. Known for his “tempérament fougueux,” Renardet had “attiré des affaires pénibles dont le tiraient toujours les magistrats de Rouÿ-le-Tors, en amis indulgents et discrets” (621). It is not for nothing that his friend, the investigating judge, is named Putoin, suggesting “putois” (skunk) and the less than respectable way that business is conducted in high society. Maupassant describes Renardet in violent terms from the beginning of his short story, comparing him to primitive animals. Even his name evokes an animal quality: the “renard” (“fox”) is associated with negative attributes in French folk tales and literature—greed, sacrilege, and laziness—all characteristics that apply to Renardet’s character.<sup>188</sup> In this case, “renard” also suggests both the hunt and the prey, since he who killed becomes the prey of his own imagination, driven to suicide.

We can contrast the sacrilegious (Renardet) with the sacred in “La Petite Roque” by the religious sublimation of Louise’s corpse in a description that accompanies the arrival of the degenerate state agents. Her body is described as illuminated by light: “En approchant, ils distinguaient peu à peu la forme, la tête voilée, tournée vers l’eau et les deux bras écarté *comme par un crucifiement*” (623; my emphasis). Likening the dead girl’s body to a crucifixion suggests that she has paid the ultimate sacrifice, her life, for a greater cause. Maupassant sacrifices this character in order to show the inefficacy of the state.

The sexualization of Louise’s dead body is paralleled by that of her death. In the second half of the story, we learn that Renardet came upon Louise bathing in a brook in the forest grove, where he could observe her without shame because he saw her as a child. The use of a young victim in Maupassant, Mirbeau, and Zola suggests that early adolescence functions as an

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<sup>188</sup> Grandadam notes that, throughout *La Petite Roque* collection, names have signification, often ironic (156).



ambiguous terrain for the male gaze, as if the child constitutes a “*fillette fatale*.” This is a matter of particular interest in literature, where texts play with criminal statistics and matters to suit the story. For example, in real life, the victims of sexual crimes of the type described in these texts could just as likely be young boys, as in the case of the sadistic murderer Joseph Vacher, known to have killed as many young shepherds as shepherdesses. However, these authors have deliberately selected a specific type of victim, drawing on categories of gender and class. We should note that Renardet offers his own explanation for what led him to commit such a heinous act. He tells the reader via interior monologue that before raping the young girl, he had been a widow for two years. Is Maupassant rationalizing the act of rape or is he criticizing these justifications? Given the acerbic portrait of both Renardet and the doctor, as well as of all the bourgeois state agents, along with the sympathetic portrait of the victim, Maupassant does not present clear evidence of misogyny.

In this second, more introspective portion of the story, the reader learns that Renardet murdered what he calls “*la petite Vénus paysanne*” in order to silence her after the rape. Before killing her, he offers her money in exchange for her complicit silence, but she is so injured that she only tries to escape. Self-preservation guides Renardet more than simply perversion. However, it is during the investigation that he shows his twisted nature, because he reveals that he “*prenait même un certain plaisir acre et douloureux à [...] innocenter ceux qu’ils suspectaient*” (1041). Renardet feels alienated after the crime, as if someone else had committed it: “*Le crime chez Maupassant est donc un de ces actes commis par un autre soi-même, une puissance étrangère à notre conscience*” (Zouaghi-Keime 107). The text clearly indicates that Renardet does not feel an iota of guilt, because his “*nature brutale ne se prêtait à aucune nuance de sentiment ou de crainte morale*” (1042). Again we find Renardet’s animality (“*brutale*”) underlined, the text reiterating his “*amour bestial*” for the “*fillette*.” By casting out notions of guilt, the story

highlights the free will of the criminal, making the text into a criminal trial of its own. The idiom of beasts extends to the idiom of beastly environments.

Renardet has already shown evidence of a violent character in the first half of the story, having thrown a stagecoach conductor under his vehicle for almost running over his dog. In addition, Renardet assaulted a game warden for crossing onto his land, and he roughly grabbed the collar of the sub-prefect during his visit to Roüy-le-Tors. To this list, we can add Renardet's surprising reaction to the crime; specifically, the physical signs of guilt that manifest to anyone who might be watching. When Renardet first learns of the corpse's discovery, he turns the "couleur de brique" (621). He walks very slowly toward the site of the body, compared to the other state representatives. Renardet subsequently refuses to allow the corpse to be kept at his home during the investigation, although this would be easier. Afterward, he is then observed walking near the site of the murder for hours. Given Renardet's predisposition to violence and his strange reaction to the body, it is clear that Renardet is guilty in the first half of the story. Maupassant takes great pains to show that someone as protected as Renardet by wealth and power can break all laws and be judged innocent by the very fact of his rank. Such narrative choices detract from the common view in criticism assimilating Maupassant's characters with the author. More and more, critics are trying to remove themselves from this old debate (e.g., Donaldson-Evans 12).

In the second half of the text, Renardet's point of view is privileged, and for many critics, this constitutes a veritable reflection by the author. According to Philippe Lejeune, Maupassant adopts a lawyer's strategy: he often chooses the most favorable case and strives to understand it, entering into this world of transgression or perversion with alarmed curiosity, of course, but nevertheless with sympathy. Maupassant is a man of mitigating circumstances, the lawyer who can bring the jurors around by

demonstrating that they too could have committed such a crime. (qtd. in Hustvedt 777)

In addition, Lejeune contrasts Maupassant's point of view with criminological literature, as well as with texts by sexologists:

It is immediately apparent that the areas these texts cover are the same as those covered in Maupassant's short stories—crime, rape, incest, parricide, infanticide, sexual perversion, insanity—but from a diametrically opposed point of view. Science at that point was still in a purely descriptive phase, with elaborately detailed inventories and categories of aberrant behaviors, deviations it condemns without a moment of hesitation or self-reflection.

In fact, though science may wholly accept these categories, writers such as Maupassant call them into question by deforming them while explicitly employing their lexicon.<sup>189</sup> In Lombrosian discourse, atavist traits are normally confined to the lower classes, but Maupassant applies “primitive” descriptions to bourgeois characters.

So, when Mitterand describes Renardet as an example of the “*détraquement d'un ordre*,” he accentuates the idea of Renardet as an aberration, in this case an evolutionary aberration. The terms that Maupassant selects to describe Renardet recall the way Zola uses atavism in *La Bête humaine*. In fact, degenerative vocabulary permeates all the descriptions of this character. Like Des Esseintes in Huysmans's *À Rebours*, Renardet is the last in the line of a rich—in this case bourgeois—family. And as in Huysmans' novel, the character's house has particular significance:

La demeure du maire [...] était une grande maison carrée, en pierre grise, très ancienne, qui avait subi des sièges autrefois, et terminée par une tour énorme, haute de vingt mètres, bâtie dans l'eau [...] On l'appelait la tour du Renard, sans

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<sup>189</sup> Scientists had their own debates about criminal theories. French criminologists were highly critical of Lombroso and others of the Italian School for neglecting the importance of studying the environment of a criminal (Pick 100).

qu'on sût au juste pourquoi; et de cette appellation sans doute était venu le nom de Renardet que portaient les propriétaires de ce fief resté dans la même famille depuis plus de cent ans, disait-on. Car les Renardet faisaient partie de cette bourgeoisie presque noble qu'on rencontrait souvent dans les provinces avant la Révolution. (1020-21)

Without family, this naturally violent creature lives alone in the “tour familial.” When Renardet throws himself from the tower, the aberration is finally suppressed.

What is the relationship between the desire for power (Renardet is mayor) and guilty desires? In this fictive society, desire is at the center of the crisis involving power and corruption. To understand better how Maupassant articulates the relationship between patriarchy and victims, I focus in the next section on the major STC of “La Petite Roque”—the forest grove. I first articulate the links between the murder site and Renardet’s house, and his subsequent hallucinations in his bedroom. Renardet’s unease comes through in the text in the increasingly detailed temporal descriptions; Renardet’s fears are first confined to the night, then to the entire day, until he seeks solace in suicidal ideation. I draw on Ferreras’s theorizing on the use of the fantastic in naturalist narratives to better explain Renardet’s hallucination. Next, I explain how Renardet, in an effort to escape from his new personal hell, first decides that destroying the grove is the only solution, before he ultimately kills himself. The razing of the grove trees constitutes yet another (figurative) iteration in the rape of Louise. We can add to this the masculine gaze of authority figures and that of the (masculinized) crowd. My reading of the symbolic significance of the chopping down of the grove differs from that of Mitterand and Targe. I place more emphasis on the role of gender and I view the cutting as a rape rather than a castration.

## La Futaie et la Chambre

Maupassant takes great pains to show that killing people is no easy business. In fact, it is nearly impossible to murder for good, because the dead always seem to reappear in ghostly form, eventually driving the murderer to madness. The setting thus plays a role in bringing the criminal to justice. The forms of punishment in “La Petite Roque” are heavily dependent on the use of temporality as a narrative technique to show how guilt manifests itself. Not only is time inserted into the narrative, but also it is often distorted and dragged out, sometimes to the point of real time. The word “heure” is used twenty-six times, most often in Renardet’s descent into madness—“Il n’était pas encore six heures” (636), “La demie de six heures sonna” (636). Like the narrator in *Le Dernier Jour*, Renardet notes clock time with increasing frequency, as his victim begins to haunt him and he contemplates suicide (as well as when he is inside his house). Expressions of time become ironic when coupled with Renardet’s despair. When he notes that it is not yet six o’clock, Renardet reasons that he has time to kill himself before dinner. Then when his servant informs him that his meal is ready, Renardet regrets his lack of willpower in committing suicide more promptly. The same scene is repeated a short time later: “L’heure du dîner sonna, il avait mangé, puis était remonté” (637). Again, Renardet maintains his dinner schedule rather than kill himself.

In this case, the irony is almost humorous, but other times it is tragic, as when Renardet waits for dawn, “l’heure ordinaire de son réveil” (637), unable to sleep. Coupled with the attention to time and his preoccupation with the murder, descriptions are infused with reminders of the victim: “Et Renardet, les doigts crispés sur ses draps, *les serrait ainsi qu’il avait serré la gorge de la petite Roque*. Il écoutait sonner les heures; il entendait battre dans le silence le balancier de sa pendule et les coups profonds de son cœur. Et il souffrait, le misérable, plus qu’aucun homme n’avait jamais souffert” (643; my emphasis). By considering the difference

between “conte” and nouvelle,” we can better understand the hallucinatory images in “La Petite Roque.”

In his introduction to *L'Espace et la nouvelle*, Issacharoff first emphasizes the predominantly French etymological problem concerning the number of terms connoting short story, most importantly “nouvelle” and “conte,” the first grounded in reality and the latter pertaining more to the “merveilleux” (7). Following Issacharoff’s definition of a short story, “La Petite Roque” does not fit conveniently into either a “conte” or a “nouvelle.” Rather, I would say that the story has the frame of a “nouvelle,” with more realistic aspects, within which we find a “conte,” where the fantastic reigns. Hallucinatory elements in the *conte* do more than point toward the fantastic, though, operating also as metaphors for the corrupt state of society. For naturalist texts, the fantastic is often present, but is employed in pragmatic ways for example, in order to bring justice to malefactors who would otherwise escape.

Daniel Ferreras convincingly argues how Maupassant’s use of the fantastic speaks to his dependence on naturalist poetics. Ferreras describes “la fonction du réalisme naturaliste” that can “mélanger habilement réalité et impossibilité afin de provoquer chez les lecteurs l’effet recherché” (77). Reality is “l’apparente normalité de l’univers narré et du personnage principal,” and “le fantastique moderne doit son efficacité à la capacité mimétique de sa représentation de la réalité” (78-79).<sup>190</sup> Maupassant’s treatment of reality is ambiguous, making his relegation to a specific literary movement problematic.<sup>191</sup> Like the family members of Zola’s “arbre généalogique,” Maupassant’s main characters are not heroes: “Décor et acteurs, la narration

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<sup>190</sup> For Jennifer Wolter, “Maupassant features elements of psychopathology in ‘Le Horla,’ as in several of his works, privileging the delusions of madness. In doing so, he brings modern science into literature, as called upon to do in the naturalist movement, thereby revitalizing the traditional fantastic with more of an emphasis on the human mind rather than the supernatural” (282). Maupassant visited Charcot, as did Henri Bergson, Edmond de Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, and Sarah Bernhardt.

<sup>191</sup> Ferreras underlines this contradiction by explaining that, “Maupassant, bien que se moquant ouvertement de cette vision de l’écriture littéraire [naturalism], en bénéficie paradoxalement à l’heure de créer ses récits fantastiques les plus réussis, qui, bien que relativement peu nombreux par rapport à la production strictement réaliste de l’auteur de *Bel Ami*, n’en demeurent pas moins exemplaires du point de vue d’une typologie générale du genre” (78).

fantastique subsiste grâce à la présence d'un code sémiotique naturaliste au sein du texte. On a besoin d'une logique officielle, d'un positivisme établi pour pouvoir opérer. On fera passer crédibilité et vraisemblance avant tout pour pouvoir faire passer l'irrecevable. En cela, le texte fantastique en est un des plus hypocrites qui soient" (Ferrerias 81). Thus, the fantastic captures the essence of the real in order to make a point, rather than for its own sake.

Maupassant rivals Hugo's skill at depicting suffering in real time (see Chapter Two), though their goals are different. In contrast to Hugo, Maupassant portrays Renardet's anguish in relation to his fear of punishment or possible guilt rather than to any absolute knowledge of approaching death. Moreover, Renardet's use of writing to confess his crime (a letter of confession written in appeal to a close political ally) is in direct contrast with Hugo's examples of textuality in *Le Dernier Jour*. Maupassant is showing, like Zola, how personal suffering throws temporal regimes into disarray. Whereas Zola illustrates the unraveling of characters' lives through their inability to maintain daily schedules, Maupassant depicts Renardet as chained to routine to an absurd degree, to the point that he puts off suicide because of dinner. Renardet's unease within his home is accompanied by his apprehension with exterior spaces, including the main STC, the forest grove.

"La futaie" is one of the two main sites described in Maupassant's story, in addition to the mayor's house, which adjoins the grove. The grove is presented in two significant ways. In the first part of the text, Maupassant limits much of his narrative to people and their physical reactions to the discovery of the dead girl's body. I argued that the portrayals of the dead girl resist any attempts at humanization. In the second part of the story, we see a resuscitation of the girl beyond the grave through supernatural or hallucinatory means. In this last portion of the text, natural elements become much more central to the action. The girl becomes part of nature, and the grove (including its subsequent destruction) echoes her death, ultimately symbolizing the bankrupt state.

To explain the function of the STC of Louise's rape, we must look at the scene when Renardet tries to commit suicide in the same forest where he raped and murdered Louise. This glade had been public space before the crime, a place where couples and families picnicked in their leisure time, a place of innocence. Since the murder, however, the space has become contaminated in people's minds and they shy away from it, in part for fear of the murderer's return, since he is still at large. This is an example of Harvey's concept of horrific spaces (see Introduction). Renardet, overwhelmed by his growing fears over being caught, begins to hallucinate nightly that the cadaver can come into his room. At first, he only experiences these visions at night, but gradually, as in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, the increasingly realistic image of the dead Louise fills him with fear night and day. In her work on "La Horla" and "La Chevelure," Jutta Fortin remarks that in Maupassant's short stories "the home as a domestic space is depicted not only as a symbol of affection and protection, but the home also simultaneously becomes the image of anxiety and fear" (32). Thus, "Maupassant not only presents the home as a symbol of security, but also depicts negative life situations in which the home becomes the concretization of human misery: loneliness, violence and perversion" (Fortin 41). "La Petite Roque" continues in this vein, as Renardet becomes terror-stricken by the dead girl's ghostly incursions, first onto his grounds, then into his bedroom.

In order to extinguish his hallucinations, Renardet resolves to destroy the grove, particularly because even the wind from the trees there seems like the voice of the murdered girl: it "semblait une plainte, et ces feuilles tombant toujours, semblaient des larmes, de grandes larmes versées par les grands arbres tristes qui pleuraient jour et nuit sur la fin de l'année [...] et aussi peut-être sur le crime qu'ils avaient vu commettre sous leur ombre, sur l'enfant violée et tuée à leur pied" (1033). In a moment of weakness, Renardet tries to kill himself by throwing his body under one of the falling trees being cut down by lumbermen—and not any random tree, but



the very one under which he killed Louise. Here madness comes after the crime, when the victim's ghost haunts Renardet to the point of attempting suicide.<sup>192</sup>

Maupassant's descriptions of the grove carry heavy symbolic significance. What Mitterand and Targe neglect is the relationship between Maupassant's grove and gender. Throughout literary history, writers have emphasized the link between nature and women.<sup>193</sup> In an important article on "La Petite Roque," André Targe compares the "nouvelle" to a detective story, likening the critic to a detective, and examines in particular spatial elements, including the river (the Brindille) in which Louise swam and Renardet's body falls into, the moss on which Louise is found, the willow tree under which she is killed, the tower (and the rock) from which Renardet jumps, before stepping back and seeing in this story an elaborate metaphor for the checkerboard. I am most concerned, for my purposes, with his analysis of the forest grove. Targe likens the felling of the trees there to a castration. However, a detailed examination of this scene proves that, rather than a castration, it evokes the earlier rape and murder. Once again, spatial elements reinforce actions done to characters. Here, nature has a decidedly negative connotation. "La Petite Roque" echoes the same sense of claustrophobia that can be found in "Le Horla," but the narrator's more removed perspective makes the reader less sympathetic.<sup>194</sup> By drawing on naturalist poetics, Maupassant develops a fierce critique of the state.

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<sup>192</sup> For Emile Durkheim, suicide exemplifies the pathological state of society, an idea that he expounds in his text *Le Suicide* (1897). The theme of suicide has been explored in art and literature alike, as in Manet's painting, "Le Suicide" (1877). Writers like Maupassant and Zola depict suicide as a wholly modern psychological response to pressures stemming from guilt, but rather than simply suggest the importance of psychology, these texts use suicide as a form of literary justice.

<sup>193</sup> "C'est aussi sous les traits d'une femme aux mains d'un savant que les arts et les lettres ont très longtemps représenté la Nature" (Mulder 412). Anne Whiston Spurr notes that the "transformation of humans into trees, trees with human qualities, gods in trees are common stories: Philomen and Baucis, Daphne and Apollo, threatening forests in Grimm" (139).

<sup>194</sup> Wolter points out that nature in "Le Horla" provides no refuge for the haunted diarist:

While going to Paris or Rouen does provide a respite from [Renardet's] mental anguish, outings in nature turn on the diarist in a manner surpassing the bare elements of the natural world to create a number of illusions playing tricks on his mind. For example, his venture into the Roumare forest quickly deteriorates from a quest for invigoration into the frightening sense of being overwhelmed by the towering row of trees [...] that enclose

The personification of the grove in “La Petite Roque,” first seen in the sound of the wind reminding Renardet of Louise, becomes even more closely tied to the victim at the moment of its own destruction. The felling of Louise’s tree, as we shall call it, is the most like the little girl’s death, described as slow and brutal with the lexicon of rape. The lumbermen (“ébrancheurs” and “bucherons”) are said to “decapitate” the trees. Using “la serpe aiguë,” each man “frappe avec lenteur, avec méthode, entaillant le membre tout près du tronc,” where the “menues branchettes palpitent longuement” (1034-35). Then, they “attaquaient” les arbres, and Renardet watches “la mort lente de sa futaie,” placing his food on a fallen tree “ainsi que sur un cadavre” (1035).<sup>195</sup> Maupassant’s anthropomorphism involves feminizing the trees, just as he feminizes victimhood.<sup>196</sup>

Though Renardet attempts suicide, he at first does not succeed, and the failure takes the initial personification of the trees one step further: “le hêtre refusa de lui casser les reins” (1046). As Mitterand suggests, chance is an example of “justice immanente” (as we have seen in *La Bête humaine*) that “comble les dégradations momentanées de l’ordre et permet à celui-ci de survivre: après son frisson d’inquiétude devant le détraquement d’un ordre auquel il croit, le soulagement de sa restauration” (“Le récit et son discours impliqué” 117). Still, Mitterand makes a small but key mistake in his assessment of this scene. For the critic, the tree misses Renardet because he hesitates, but the text indicates otherwise. The tree “refuses” to kill Renardet, and we can interpret this as nature’s refusal to deny him an easy way out. I take issue with this observation because it has significant ramifications for the parceling out of justice in the text.

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him under a thick, green, almost black, ceiling (2 juin). The ensuing panic of being alone, then of being pursued, causes him to turn in circles, his eyes deceiving him. (280)

<sup>195</sup> At the beginning of the story, when the authorities first come upon Louise’s body, they do the same thing, poking it with a cane.

<sup>196</sup> Grandadam points out that the version appearing in *Gil Blas* is much less feminized than that of the published collection. In comparing a short passage where Louise’s ghost approaches Renardet’s window, Grandadam demonstrates Maupassant’s decision to use more feminine nouns for the ghost, along with a repetition of the demonstrative pronoun “elle” (141).

The greatest drama in “La Petite Roque” is the dedramatization of Louise’s death by the judicial process and its agents, all guilty of corruption, as well as the failure of this system to find the real culprit. In creating the character of Renardet, Maupassant wields the common currency of degenerative language, turning it against those who use it with prejudice against marginalized figures. The presumed innocence of Renardet, despite insistent signs pointing to his guilt that even the investigating judge (who considers himself a wily investigator) fails to perceive, stems from his social class. Maupassant mocks the lexicon of degeneration as well as its application by agents of power, who only use it to prop up a corrupt system. The objective doctor, the “perspicace” (1028) investigative judge, and the mayor “très aimé dans le pays” (1021), all target the wrong suspect, blind to the truth because of their public ties and fear of losing their place in society. Notwithstanding Maupassant’s portrayal of the fiercely democratic mailman, Médéric, he imbues “La Petite Roque” with an overall sense of fatal degeneracy.

For Tsikounas, when authority figures incarnate evil, they do not show physiological signs of their behavior, unlike the poor, nor do they have objective reasons for their crimes.<sup>197</sup> And rather than confess their crimes to a priest, upper-class criminals use writing, such as Renardet’s letter, to expiate their guilt (such as Renardet’s letter). However, Médéric, the postman who discovers Louise’s body and who refuses to deliver the letter, stops Renardet. Sharing the “defender of justice” role with nature, the “facteur” is frequently used by Maupassant as a plot device. In various short stories—such as “L’orphelin,” “Le crime au père Boniface,” and “La petite Roque”—the postman is a catalyst that begins or ends a story by discovering some unusual circumstance, usually of a criminal nature: Médéric provides both a narrative function,

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<sup>197</sup> “Pourtant, si Guy de Maupassant, par ces divers procédés littéraires, nous force à comprendre qu’hommes, jeunes et vieux, nantis et déshérités [...] sont capables des mêmes détresses et des mêmes délires, en revanche, il nous suggère aussi que seules les élites savent vivre ‘le bonheur dans le crime,’ que les simples, pris de remords ou fiers d’avoir assouvi leur vengeance, avouent leurs forfaits et s’en remettent à la justice des hommes” (404). “La Petite Roque” is only one of many Maupassantian stories where a village mayor acts in unbecoming ways (e.g., “Le Père Milon,” “La Mère Sauvage,” “Saint-Antoine,” and “Vagabond”), but it is certainly the most violent.

by framing the story, and a symbolic function as a model of Republican citizenship in this moralistic tale.<sup>198</sup>

Maupassant makes use of the character of the mailman to portray the only kind of successful state justice as coming from a humble civil servant, one with much less power than Renardet. What finally and literally pushes Renardet over the edge is his decision to denounce himself to the prosecuting judge, after having mailed a letter in which he states that through suicide he will “exécuter le criminel” (1047). The second time the mayor tries to kill himself, he uses a pistol, to no avail. Finally, he decides to throw himself off the family tower. However, just before he steps off the edge, he manages to convince himself that his death is unnecessary, and he tries to interrupt the letter’s delivery. That Renardet takes such pains with his own life, but decides to end that of another (Louise) in an instant, points to his complete ethical corruption and selfishness. The letter, however, is now in the hands of Médéric, and Renardet tries to blackmail the mailman just as he tried to purchase the raped girl’s silence. Again, Renardet fails to purchase a member of the proletariat, as the postman proves incorruptible (a rare find in Maupassant!). For Mitterand, Renardet’s underhanded methods suggest a “péjoration” by authority figures against the “valorisation” of marginalized characters (“Le récit et son discours impliqué” 118). Deprived of any hope of what he considers “redemption,” Renardet finally does throw himself from the “Tour Renardet,” and the last sentence describes his bludgeoned body oozing into the river, “un long filet rose de cervelle et de sang mêlés” (1051).<sup>199</sup> This phrase is followed by Maupassant’s dating of the story (December 18-23, 1885)—an odd pairing of the narrative time and the time at which the story was supposedly written, making for one strange Christmas tale.

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<sup>198</sup> Because his function defines him, few stories give the “facteur” a surname. In “La Petite Roque,” however, this role is extended, underscored by the fact that the postman receives a name. This name, Médéric Rompel, also has symbolic interest. It connotes courage and is associated with the formerly popular Saint Médéric, said to have freed prisoners and cured the sick on his pilgrimage to Paris.

<sup>199</sup> “The association of water with blood, violence and ultimately with death is common in Maupassant’s work and is not unrelated to its sexual symbolism” (Donaldson-Evans 21). However, while “Eros and Thanatos go hand in hand [...] in ‘La Petite Roque,’” Donaldson-Evans points out that other stories, like “Mouche,” offer a more positive image of rivers (23).

Blame is attributed to the poor and outcast, to those least able to defend themselves or even to participate in a system that condemns them in advance in nineteenth-century France. Maupassant shows a kind of social caste system where the illusion of bourgeois respectability must be maintained at all cost by those in power, as we have previously seen in *La Bête humaine*. For Maupassant, “[l]a politique [...] paraît une plaisanterie et la démocratie un leurre” (Forestier lviii). This corruption can still be seen in the French political system in the way that presidents remain fairly protected from punishment for illegal acts during their time in office. Within these self-sustaining systems of power, those in charge are, by their very position, outside the laws that they create and enact. Maupassant’s skepticism about political power is evident in “La Petite Roque.” His negative view of society adheres to Murphy’s assertion (discussed in the introduction) that pessimistic outlooks, bound up in theories of degeneracy as the century’s end neared (see 22-23), are at work in naturalist narratives. In the following chapter, I show that Mirbeau displays the same lack of faith in the Third Republic as Maupassant and that he takes naturalist poetics one step further in his STC of sexual violence.

## Chapter 5

### ***Vol, viol et vitriol: Octave Mirbeau's Le Journal d'une femme de chambre***

In *Reading for the Plot* (1984), Brooks demonstrates that secularization in France entailed the “loss of providential plots” and hence the “nineteenth century’s obsession with questions of origin, evolution, progress, genealogy, its foregrounding of the historical narrative as par excellence the necessary mode of explanation and understanding” (6-7). Mirbeau’s *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* illustrates this idea through a satirical portrayal of the Belle Époque. Ziegler asserts that, “[f]oremost among his contemporaries, Mirbeau was committed to the advancement of justice and the redressing of wrongs” (*The Nothing Machine* 8). *Le Journal* is no exception. Criticizing both the state and the church at a time when they were not yet fully separate, Mirbeau depicts nineteenth-century France as a country of sweeping injustices and inequalities.

For many, Mirbeau is “l’auteur d’un seul livre,” and that book is *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (Michel, *Œuvres romanesques* 339).<sup>200</sup> This novel is the fictive journal of a domestic servant, Célestine, who chronicles her current job with the Lanlaire family, as well as the many prior families under whom she has worked. Her anecdotes bear witness to the “putrid” nature of bourgeois society. Célestine’s unique perspective as a maid not only brings an “effet de réel” as that of an, albeit voyeuristic, eyewitness, but also underlines the difference between a family’s “exterior” and “interior,” thus exposing the extreme hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. Like Zola in *Pot-Bouille* (1882), Mirbeau describes the middle class as insincere by dramatizing the difference between conventional appearances and reality. Prevailing bourgeois wisdom cannot admit that

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<sup>200</sup> From this point, I will abbreviate *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* as *Le Journal*.

servants would ever be in the right over Madame or Monsieur. Moreover, innocence and benevolence, far from being valued in such a strictly guarded hierarchy, are never rewarded. Just as Maupassant argues that authority figures (including mayors and judges) are considered innocent by reason of social standing, Mirbeau shows domestic servants to be suspicious by reason of class.

In order to survive in the unjust world that *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* presents, a domestic servant must be furtive. Mirbeau's text contains a variety of characters that use whatever means necessary to get by as best they can, whether through manipulation or violence. There are some who lie to those above them, like William, the Anglophone servant who usurps time in order to engage in his equestrian hobbies. Then there is Rose, who seduces her employer and effectively takes over the household. Mirbeau's narrator, Célestine, uses an entirely novel form of rebellion to endure the unfair practices of servitude. Selecting the honest written and spoken word as a weapon against her masters, often at her own peril, Célestine reveals their dishonesty, though this results more often in her dismissal than in a redressing of rights. Time and time again, she is unable to contain her disgust at the duplicity of the ruling classes, and as her reward, she unerringly finds herself back on the street and in line at the Paris work placement office.<sup>201</sup> Her written account, on the other hand, is her most successful and least perilous weapon, used to unearth the mountain of "crimes" left unpunished by society.

The structure of *Le Journal* continues to trouble critics, who see anticipations of modernism but cannot help but bemoan a certain lack of organization.<sup>202</sup> For Michel, the format of the novel consists of "une juxtaposition de souvenirs jetés pêle-mêle sur le papier" (OR 1162).

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<sup>201</sup> For Reg Carr, Mirbeau uses the portrait of Célestine to show the degeneration of the working class from its contact with the morally rotten bourgeoisie, since Célestine, a servant who starts as a simple country girl, finishes by acquiring many of the characteristics of her masters (136-37).

<sup>202</sup> "En passant constamment du passé au présent, sans suivre aucun ordre chronologique, en brouillant les séries temporelles, en entremêlant souvenirs, sensations présentes, réflexions et scènes rapportées, il brise la linéarité du récit traditionnel et fait éclater le caractère éminemment conventionnel de la composition romanesque [...]" (Michel, *Octave Mirbeau: Oeuvre Romanesque* 349).

Ziegler views *Le Journal*'s arrangement as an "episodic, broken entity" (*The Nothing Machine* 135). For Martine Gantrel, "the list of [Célestine's] former employers is as dizzying as her life is chaotic—an impression that her diary reinforces by its random association of thoughts" ("Homeless Women" 248). Rather than viewing *Le Journal* as fragmented or unorganized, I show that there is a complex and tightly woven structure, both in terms of imagery and narration, by concentrating on a neglected aspect of Mirbeau's novel—the murder of "la petite Claire."

Claire's unsolved homicide is central to *Le Journal*. Foremost, it is a key structural element in the narrative. With over twenty-four explicit mentions in over half the novel's chapters, the rape and murder of this small peasant child in the Raillon forest permeates the text from beginning to end. Despite the many references to this event, Mirbeau maintains a persistent ambiguity regarding the perpetrator. The narrator both obsesses over the mystery of Claire's death and relays conversations wherein other characters discuss this local "fait divers," but Mirbeau never allows the reader any certainty regarding the guilty party. Célestine focuses her attention on the Lanlaire's gardener, Joseph, as a probable suspect, but despite the amount of incriminating evidence tying him to Claire the day of her murder, the text continues to debate his guilt to the very last page. Because of this uncertainty, Claire's name is highly ironic, since her life and death are not clear at all.<sup>203</sup>

Most critics who bring up Claire do so only to discuss how Luis Buñuel's film adaptation of the novel changes her role radically, and along with it Célestine's (Pór 176 and 181-82). Kalai is the exception, viewing Claire's murder as "au centre du roman" (66). In a novel of seventeen chapters, Claire is first mentioned (though not by name) in Chapter Eight. As readers, however, we are prepared for Claire's death by the initial seven chapters, many of which lay the

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<sup>203</sup> This irony is perhaps subconsciously illustrated earlier in the novel, prior to Claire's murder, through syntactic and lexical pairings. As Célestine listens to Joseph discuss his hate for Zola's role in the Dreyfus affair, she muses: "Son affaire [what would happen to Zola] serait claire, et c'est Joseph qui s'en charge" (156). This possibly satirical use of the feminine adjectival form "clair" anticipates the link between Joseph and Claire, as well as Joseph's violent tendencies.



groundwork for an atmosphere of perpetual violence and abuse. Chapter Eight contains five references to Claire, while Chapter Nine contains twelve—the most by far. Chapter Eleven speaks of Claire three times, whilst Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen make only one mention of Claire each. Beyond their number, the complexity of these iterations calls into question the widely held view that the novel lacks a coherent structure. Célestine, in so frequently recalling the slaughter and interrogating Joseph, brings this tragic event—an unseen murder in the Raillon forest—back into the narrative.

The revisions Mirbeau made from *Le Journal*'s published serial form to the Fasquelle version substantiate the centrality of Claire's murder.<sup>204</sup> Aside from adding new chapters to the completed novel, Mirbeau makes other changes that show the text's complex structure. In terms of time and space, for instance, he adds dates to each chapter.<sup>205</sup> And he moves the narrative forward twelve years, from 1886 to 1898, in line with significant dates in the Dreyfus affair.<sup>206</sup> In addition to changing the novel's dates, Mirbeau "prend bien soin de situer précisément ses personnages dans l'espace" (Michel, *OR* 352). We will see this greater attention to spatial detail in the descriptions of Claire's death and of Célestine's early sexual experiences. The latter was

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<sup>204</sup> Much of the novel in its completed form derives from previous "chroniques" published in *L'Echo de Paris* from 1891 to 1892 (Michel, *OR* 340-43 and 352). For the final version of the novel, the 1900 Fasquelle edition, Mirbeau added three chapters—Chapters Two, Three, and Ten (Michel, *OR* 355). These are important changes, since Chapter Ten contains the most developed STC of Claire's murder.

<sup>205</sup> "La première version n'était pratiquement pas datée, mais les deux seules indications temporelles fournies permettaient de situer l'arrivée de Célestine chez les Lauaire [sic] en 1886. L'action a donc été décalée de douze ans" (Michel, *OR* 1238).

<sup>206</sup> "Le roman s'ouvre en septembre 1898, au moment où, après le prétendu 'suicide' du colonel Henry, le 31 août, l'horizon commence à s'éclaircir pour les dreyfusistes, et où la voie de la révision du procès Dreyfus semble enfin débloquée: la demande de Lucie Dreyfus sera déclarée recevable le 29 octobre. Et il s'achève dix mois plus tard, peu avant que ne commence le procès en révision, au moment où Dreyfus vient de débarquer à Quiberon et d'être transféré à la prison de Rennes" (Michel, *OR* 354). Isabelle Saulquin calls the novel "le roman de l'Affaire" (17). Christopher Lloyd, for example, examines the way the Dreyfus affair influences the novel's structure and content (52-67). In analyzing the role of names, both historical and fictional, Lloyd contends that Dreyfus is the key historical name of reference for the novel, explaining away Mirbeau's past conservative leanings: "Whatever his earlier anti-Semitism, by the end of the century Mirbeau had placed himself firmly in the dreyfusard camp, perceiving in the disgraced Jewish officer a victim not merely of a grotesque miscarriage of justice, but also of a conspiracy hatched by the repressive forces of the army, Church and state" (57). I do not focus on the Dreyfus affair in relation to the novel, since this has been developed elsewhere. Instead, I concentrate on how Mirbeau's sense of social injustices directly affects his poetics.

also added, as was a further development of Joseph's character (Michel, *OR* 352 and 354). The connection between Célestine's sexuality and the assassination of Claire are complex, as my analysis later in the chapter shows.

The ambiguity surrounding Joseph's behavior, coupled with his Lombrosian portrait, is central to Mirbeau's complicated classifications of human beings.<sup>207</sup> I present Joseph as an exaggerated representation of Lombroso's idea of the born criminal. One of the ways that Mirbeau satirizes the France of his time is by taking to task conventions of the newly established field of criminology, a domain heavily influenced by notions of heredity and evolution. Lombroso's vastly influential work, *L'Homme criminel* (1894), translated into French only a few years before Mirbeau's novel, attempts to classify scientifically the characteristics of the common criminal. We know from records of Mirbeau's library that he owned two of Lombroso's works, including *L'Homme criminel* (Michel, "Mirbeau and Lombroso" 232). Ziegler maintains that Mirbeau's resistance to systems of classification associated with criminology can be found throughout his œuvre: "In opposition to the walls of classification and containment erected by policemen and scientists, Mirbeau proposes the multiplication of social personas in *Un Gentilhomme* [1919], the possibilities of deviant sexualities in *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*, and the aesthetics of sadism in *Le Jardin des supplices*" ("Naturalism as Paranoia in Octave Mirbeau" 58). I would add that in *Le Journal* Mirbeau presents a pessimistic view of society's attempts to classify and separate people into normative categories, just as he shows that criminal behavior cannot be relegated to a particular social class. Through Joseph, the supposed "rare pearl" of a servant who escapes all punishment, Mirbeau condemns the supreme hypocrisy

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<sup>207</sup> Michel sees the novel's ambiguity as its strength: "il convient au contraire de voir dans son refus du manichéisme et dans cette ambivalence du désir une richesse inestimable, qui constitue, pour une bonne part, l'extrême modernité de l'œuvre" (363).

of society.<sup>208</sup> By studying descriptions of Joseph in the novel, I show how Mirbeau clearly delineates this character as a criminal by his various tattoos and brutish body and behavior, all the while exaggerating these details to the point of satire.<sup>209</sup> While Joseph's suspected crimes are treated with a certain amount of gravity, his characterization also includes comic elements. Previous criticism has too often taken the portrait of Joseph literally, missing the humorous aspects that reveal new readings of the text. Mirbeau questions not only the ability to "read" the criminal body, but also the motivations of those who view it.

I begin with a description of the lexicon of crime and violence that permeate *Le Journal* from start to finish, "crime" being the last word in the novel. These expressions, as well as their derivations, are repeated so often as to lose all meaning. I believe that the author does this quite self-consciously in order to force us, as readers, to question the terms themselves. How do we define "crime" and "criminal"? Who are the real victims of society? Mirbeau gives us no easy answers, but negates the ones so readily provided by the state and society at large. I then argue that the narrative structure of *Le Journal* is far more organized than critics suggest. Mirbeau relies on a variety of techniques to anchor the reader within Célestine's diary, including attention to precise temporality and innovative typographical elements. Next, I demonstrate Mirbeau's focus on spatial metaphors and configurations, from casting everyday spaces as prison-like (the village, the "bureau de placement") to the central importance in the text of organic spaces (including gardens and the Raillon forest). Lastly, I examine Joseph as a complex portrait (and parody) of the criminal type.

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<sup>208</sup> Likewise, Maupassant's "Denis" (1883) depicts an ideal servant who almost stabs his employer for his money. In suggesting that perfect servants are suspicious, Mirbeau and Maupassant betray their naturalist pessimism. In such an unjust world, no servant would be devoted unless it was for personal gain.

<sup>209</sup> Others have noted additional satiric elements in the novel. For Gantrel, "Mirbeau uses Célestine to satirize what the so-called crisis of domestic personnel is really about, that is, bourgeois self-centeredness" ("Homeless Women" 259).

### Lexicon of Violence and Crime

Before looking at Mirbeau's treatment of Claire's rape-murder, let us first examine how he prepares the way for this violence through a lexical field of crime. It is not so much the frequency with which we find the word "crime" that is important, though this is impressive.<sup>210</sup> Rather, it is the fact that Mirbeau uses the word ironically, undermining its meaning. In one episode, a bordel owner tells Célestine that she is wasting her time cleaning houses: "Et *c'est un vrai crime* de laisser en friche et de gaspiller avec des gens de maison une telle beauté!" (353; my emphasis). Another example is when a colleague tells Célestine that not taking advantage of one's employers constitutes a crime: "Quand on a des maîtres aussi bêtes que ceux-là, *ce serait un crime* de ne pas en profiter" (411; my emphasis). Finally, in a similar fashion, Rose advises Célestine to go to Madame Gouin (the "faiseuse d'anges") should she become pregnant, in order not to "murder" her body: "À votre place, je n'hésiterais pas... Une jolie fille comme vous, si distinguée, et qui doit être si bien faite... un enfant, *ce serait un meurtre*" (211; my emphasis). In each of these instances, we could replace "un crime" and "un meurtre" with "dommage." Mirbeau's hyperbole seems purposeful in the way that it works against a definitive meaning for such loaded words, since it would reinforce his aim of denaturalizing words that political institutions use as weapons.

Besides "crime," the word "violence" in its various forms—violent(e)(s), violence, violemment—occurs thirty-seven times in the novel. We also find related terms, especially noun and verb forms of "viol," of which twenty-two instances can be discerned. The majority of the time, the narrator speaks of rape in relation to Claire. But even prior to Claire's death, first alluded to in Chapter Eight, we find Célestine mulling over her own sexual experiences in terms

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<sup>210</sup> Using the ARTFL-FRANTEXT online database for French literature, I here ascertained that "crime" occurs roughly thirty times in the text, comparable in its frequency only to Zola's *La Bête humaine* and *Thérèse Raquin* or to Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*.

of possible rapes (Chapter Five). Even before we hear her musings, however, we find repeated examples of homonyms for verbal forms of “viol.” In the first chapter, several words phonetically suggest rape, including “violon” and “violet.” In describing the Lanlaire household, Célestine remarks that “les cloisons trop minces faites de planches trop sèches, rendent les chambres sonores, comme des intérieurs de *violon*” (47; my emphasis). Phonetically, “violon” is identical to the third-person plural of the verb “violier.” The color “violet” is also repeated three times in succession, like an incantation, when Célestine is speaking of Monsieur Rabour’s face after death: “j’aurais cru qu’il dormait, si son visage n’eût été *violet*, *violet* affreusement, de ce *violet* sinistre qu’ont les aubergines” (41; my emphasis). Again, phonetically, “violet” is the same as the infinitive, “violier,” and the past participle, “violé.” That Monsieur Rabour is already linked to sexuality by his affinity for “les bottines” has been widely noted (Apter). The repetition, however, of “violet” serves as a precursor for the way that sexuality will be linked to violence in what follows.

We also find a similar repetition of the word “voleuse” in Célestine’s diatribe against domestic servitude, protesting against the fact that, as maids, she and her colleagues have

la conscience des suspicions blessantes qui nous accompagnent partout, qui, partout, devant nous, verrouillent les portes, cadennassent les tiroirs, ferment à triple tour les serrures, marquent les bouteilles, numérotent les petits fours et les pruneaux, et, sans cesse, glissent sur nos mains, dans nos poches, des regards policiers. Car il n’y a pas une porte, pas une armoire, pas une bouteille, pas un objet qui ne nous crie: ‘Voleuse!... voleuse!... voleuse! (315-16)

This double series of accumulations with its emphasis on measurement and counting reminds us of Zola’s *La Bête humaine*, where time had to be accounted for in much the same way. Here, however, I would emphasize the repetition of the word “voleuse.” “Le vol” is a theme throughout *Le Journal*, in so far as servants are constantly suspected of stealing, as Célestine explains. The

truth, however, is that more often than not it is the people in charge who are stealing from servants. Several times, Célestine mentions that employers borrow money from her and do not pay it back, taking advantage of her lack of power, since their word will always be believed over hers. At other times, Célestine is accused of owing money to people who have taken advantage of her. When Célestine tries to leave the convent that is temporarily housing her (Notre-Dame-des-Trente-Six-Douleurs), she is told that she owes the sisters money and that her leaving before paying up constitutes stealing in the eyes of the sister: “Mais, mademoiselle... savez-vous bien que c'est un vol? ... Et voler de pauvres femmes comme nous, c'est plus qu'un vol... un sacrilège dont le bon Dieu vous punira...” (319). This satirical portrait of a religious order, evident in the hypocritical invocation of sin, effectively eliminates the Church as a possible haven for marginalized figures like Célestine. In addition, the theme of “le vol” carries on throughout the novel.<sup>211</sup> Just as Mirbeau builds up to the violence of Claire’s murder, he introduces the general idea of theft before concentrating on a specific episode. By bombarding the reader with all of these associations, along with numerous repetitions of specific words, Mirbeau blurs the semantic and phonetic space between “vol,” “viol” and “violence.”

Through hyperbole and phonetic wordplay, Mirbeau demonstrates the absurdity of the contemporary world. Ziegler recognizes that Mirbeau’s penchant for seeing the cruel irrationality in daily life is fundamental to understanding his poetics. Ziegler likens the fictional world of Mirbeau to a “nothing machine” that must be overthrown in order to “[restore] interpretive freedom” (*The Nothing Machine* 134). Entities that give meaning—such as the government—are seen as oppressive, and therefore the goal becomes “the self-unwriting novel” (148) that will overthrow this tyrannical meaning-inflicting machinery. Drawing on Ziegler’s notion of the “nothing machine” in Mirbeau’s fiction, I show that in *Le Journal* Mirbeau evacuates words like

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<sup>211</sup> The theft of the Lanlaire’s silverware becomes the dominant image of stealing in the last chapters.

“vol,” “crime,” and “violence” of their naturalized meanings and replaces these with new implications that highlight social injustice.

In *Le Journal*, Mirbeau defines crimes differently than society. Where bourgeois convention sees a transgression, Mirbeau sees the marginalization of the lower classes, and especially of women and their families. The true definition of a crime for Mirbeau is that social discrimination not only go unpunished, but are continually perpetuated, both by the bourgeoisie and by the oppressed agents themselves (here servants). The meaning attributed to “crime” by society is seen to be illusory as Mirbeau confronts the reader with servants who risk being fired by telling the truth to their employers, as well as because of more dire cases, such as the consequences of pregnancy. For a maid, or a manservant with a wife, reproduction is not allowed, and a woman must hide her pregnancy (or children) in order to retain her employment. In this way, for a servant to become pregnant is seen as a “crime” by the ruling class. The novel is littered with examples of employers who won’t allow their servants to visit their children, who are sent elsewhere during their employment. We also find female servants who hide their pregnancy or children, or who even go so far as to kill their newborns.

Mirbeau renews the sense of the word “crime” by presenting the severe inequalities of Belle Époque society as crimes that go unpunished. Just beneath society’s honest façade, the corrupting nature of power keeps in place a system that benefits very few and makes criminals of almost everyone. At the very least, submitting to blatant unfairness often leads to passive acceptance framed in philosophies of destiny and fatality. At its worst, domestic servants aspire to illegal activity as a fantasy to counter their unjust exploitation by the upper classes, and this vengeance is difficult to criticize. Transgressions becomes a weapon in a world that does not aid those in need, marginalized by the social and political system in place, dominated by a greedy bourgeoisie. One critic asks, “Is honesty a meaningful concept [...] in a society where criminality wears the mask of facile virtue?” (Lloyd 54). The fact that “crime” is the last word in the novel

only reinforces the moral vacuum of the age, because the real offense implied by the novel is the number of injustices committed against vulnerable, marginalized agents—young girls, women, and the poor. Servants who have been mercilessly exploited can only rejoice when the tables are turned on their employers. Consider Célestine’s reaction when burglars steal her masters’ most precious possessions, their silver: “Et je les plaindrais ?... Ah ! non... Ce qui leur arrive, c’est la justice. En les dépouillant d’une partie de leurs biens, en donnant de l’air aux trésors enfouis, les bons voleurs ont rétabli l’équilibre” (436). For Célestine, then, the equilibrium is out of kilter, with justice tilted in favor of the rich. To re-establish balance, people need to be shocked out of complacency.

Mirbeau reinforces the criminality of the upper class through examples of their corruption. The reoccurring loss of employment creates a circularity that applies equally to Célestine’s views of social prestige and bourgeois hypocrisy. Because capital is often obtained criminally in order to increase one’s respect, she has reservations about her employers’ wealth. In Chapter Two, she describes the questionable sources of the Lanlaires’s fortune, as explained to her by a local shopkeeper, Madame Gouin. Madame Lanlaires’s dowry includes stolen silverware and an imprisoned father, and Monsieur’s family made their money on the “traite des blancs” (63), helping rich families get out of enlistment by replacing their sons with poor young men. Another prior employer was esteemed by the community for his good religious works. However, as Célestine describes it, religion is a moneymaking scheme like any other. Monsieur was “dans les pèlerinages” (257), a phrasing that likens pilgrimage work to any other lucrative career. Célestine has seen too much hypocrisy to take anyone with money seriously, since she finds out each time that it is tainted in one form or another.

In addition to challenging basic terms such as “crime” and “criminal,” Mirbeau plays with words, creating surprising associations that underline his larger social critique. The complex imagery that we find in *Le Journal* calls into question any possibility of justice and progress not



only in the Third Republic, but in general as well. To undermine the prevailing view of positive linear development in society, Mirbeau uses a cyclical portrayal of time, money, and corruption throughout the social classes. Mirbeau draws on a specific STC—Claire’s rape in the Raillon forest—in order to criticize conventional notions of morality so precious to the middle and upper classes. By placing the Raillon forest in a tangential relationship with the Lanlaire’s domestic gardens and the town of Mesnil-Roy, the author buttresses his argument concerning the role of gender and class in moral decisions with complex imagery. In the following pages, I conduct a comprehensive and somewhat linear reading of the place of Claire’s murder in the text. Such rigor is necessary, since no previous study has mentioned Claire in any detail. The critical literature glosses over her murder in much the same way that the justice system forgets her in the narrative. Before examining Claire’s murder, I highlight two earlier episodes of sexual assault involving Célestine that anticipate the violence that follows and that build a complex metaphor of cyclical decay.

### **“Tout se remplace”: Circularity and Crime**

To understand the relation between time, space, and the representation of violence in *Le Journal*, it is first essential to examine its narrative structure. Similar in some respects to Hugo’s *Le Dernier Jour d’un condamné*, each dated chapter (or entry) moves forward in time, while interior fragments recall the past. The journal begins on the fourteenth of September, continues every few days through the end of November, and finishes with the last chapter set in the following March. Most chapters situate the present in the Lanlaire household in Normandy, while the narrator’s flashbacks recall Célestine’s background and previous employment. However, the last chapter moves to Cherbourg, and the closing flashback features Célestine’s last few months at the Lanlaire’s before leaving with Joseph.

Far from being unorganized or fragmented, the revised narrative published by Fasquelle is tightly connected and characterized by a host of cohesive tools, including foreshadowing, transitions between flashbacks and the present, justified flashbacks, and typographical divisions (spaces) between the present and the flashbacks. There are many flashbacks to Célestine's past, but these are often anticipated by brief mentions in earlier chapters and referred to again afterward. Furthermore, these flashbacks are always motivated in ways not dissimilar to Zola's *La Bête humaine*. On first arriving at the Lanlaire's in Normandy, Célestine recalls another post in the country: "Ce n'est pas la première fois que je suis engagée en province. Il y a quatre ans, j'y a fait une place" (34). A flashback to the Rabour household follows, with the famous "bottines" episode (34-44). While some past recollections, such as this one, can be quite long, they are framed by the present with fairly seamless transitions. A case in point is when, after her flashback, Célestine returns to the present, and goes on to describe the details of her new employment (44-61). Another example of a motivated flashback (or what we could call a motivated analepsis) is in Chapter Five. Célestine learns that her mother has died, and she is not allowed to go to the funeral. Her mother's death then triggers a description of her background—her family from Audierne, her beating by a drunk mother who had become a prostitute after her father's death, her own and her siblings' subsequent marginalization and escape, and finally Célestine's first sexual experiences (129-32). Returning to the present, Marianne cries with Célestine over the loss of her mother. Each of these examples involves a repeated order—a detail from Célestine's work at the Lanlaire's triggers a past recollection. Rather than dominating the narrative, however, these past experiences inform and contextualize Célestine's reactions and opinions.

Célestine uses people from her different jobs like recurring characters that she calls on to illustrate whatever frame of mind she is in. She has worked in so many places that she has an almost Balzatian repertoire of dozens of situations and characters on which to draw. When she

tires from the oppressive work at the Lanlaire household, she thinks back to easier times at other houses, for example. Past episodes never occupy entire chapters, except for Chapter Ten, so that the reader is consistently kept in the present—a present dominated by Célestine’s obsession with Claire’s death. Mirbeau uses a myriad of creative ways to weave in different strands of narrative. Célestine’s repeated “places” take on a cyclical nature. On the first page, we learn that this is her twelfth post in two years, not counting the prior years of service. Célestine sees her inability to keep a job as a kind of perversity, but her behavior often shows a form of integrity, since she is seemingly incapable of selling out (through prostitution), though often tempted.

In this back and forth between past and present, both temporality and typography anchor the reader. Mirbeau draws on the conventions of journal writing, just as Hugo does in *Le Dernier Jour*. Beyond the date of any given chapter, we find explicit references to time within chapters that help prevent reader confusion. The novel’s opening page includes the exact hour of Célestine’s arrival at the Lanlaire’s—“Aujourd’hui, 14 septembre, à trois heures de l’après-midi, par un temps doux, gris et pluvieux, je suis entrée dans ma nouvelle place” (33). An episode in one of the last chapters explicitly recalls *Le Dernier Jour*, as Célestine describes not only the time of writing, but the space around her: “Il est deux heures du matin... Mon feu va s’éteindre, ma lampe charbonne, et je n’ai plus de bois, ni huile. Je vais me coucher” (430).<sup>212</sup> Such entries bring immediacy to Mirbeau’s writing. When critics point to incoherency in Célestine’s journal, they may be referring to entries that are unfulfilled, such as when she ruminates on the possibility of

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<sup>212</sup> Like Mirbeau, Hugo emphasizes the passing of each second (and shifting between thoughts) with the use of trailing periods (“points de suspension”). Cécile Narjoux finds that Mirbeau’s incessant use of this form of punctuation in *Le Journal* accomplishes a variety of functions, for example making the text (a diary, after all) appear more spontaneous, as if the narrator were including her hesitations. Trailing periods also suggest strong emotional states that make speaking (or writing) momentarily impossible. As Yannick Lemarié states: “On ne saurait donc s’étonner de trouver dans *Sébastien Roch* toute une ligne de points: elle figure une plaie ouverte sur la page, une béance dans le texte, le lieu où la parole se néantise, car aucun mot ne traduit un viol d’enfant, l’horreur d’un monde dorénavant insensé.” In my view, however, the description of rape is elliptic in *Sébastien Roch* because the rape concerns a young boy, whereas *Le Journal* has extremely graphic descriptions of rape. See also Jacques Dürrenmat’s work on punctuation in Mirbeau.

seeing Joseph “demain,” but the next chapter shows that a long period of time has elapsed since this last entry: “Voici huit mois que je n’ai écrit une seule ligne de ce journal. [...] et voici trois mois exactement que Joseph et moi nous avons quitté le Prieuré” (431). Such ruptures are common in conventional journal-writing, and serve to make *Le Dernier Jour* seem more like a real document.

Beyond illustrating ideologies of discipline and creating narrative cohesion, dates function as metaphors.<sup>213</sup> October 6 is the anniversary of Celestine’s former lover’s death, Monsieur Xavier. After situating the present by describing the onset of autumn, she describes the date’s importance: “Justement, aujourd’hui, 6 octobre, voici une date pleine de souvenirs... Depuis cinq années que s’est accompli le drame que je veux conter, tous les détails en sont demeurés vivaces en moi” (165). To commemorate Monsieur Xavier’s death, Célestine takes flowers to his grave annually. Here, she touches on the relation between memory (and therefore time), mourning, and space: “Mais ces fleurs, que je n’irai point porter sur sa tombe, j’en ferai un bouquet plus durable et qui ornera, et qui parfamera sa mémoire chérie mieux que les fleurs de cimetière, le coin de terre où il dort” (165). Célestine continues this lyric passage in a remarkable way, depicting her heart as a space that contains only debauchery, but also of a purer love: “Car les fleurs dont sera composé le bouquet que je lui ferai, j’irai les cueillir, une à une, dans le jardin de mon cœur... dans le jardin de mon cœur où ne poussent pas que les fleurs mortelles de la débauche, où éclosent aussi les grands lys blancs de l’amour” (165-66). This metaphor of Célestine’s heart as a wretched garden echoes the Baudelarian pairing of beauty and ugliness. But Célestine is not the only “fleur du mal” in *Le Journal*. The novel consistently refers to the

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<sup>213</sup> Time also shapes the regimented routine of domesticity—when Célestine is expected to awaken each morning (five o’clock) and when she must accomplish certain tasks. An exaggerated precision in chronological detail, such as the hour of Celestine’s arrival at the Lanlaires, reinforces these temporal ideologies. Elsewhere, we find Madame Lanlaires’s peculiar habit of getting the servants to clean her silverware the same day each year—November 6, a date only significant for the regimented routine it implies. In referring to previous jobs, Célestine cites temporal practices as well. In Chapter Seven, she is told to serve Monsieur Xavier his coffee each day at nine o’clock (see 256).

domestic gardens cultivated by the bourgeoisie for which she works. We should keep this metaphor in mind, because the garden is a complex space that Mirbeau links to the Raillon forest through violent events.

In addition to particular spaces, place is stressed in *Le Journal* through regional differences and through differences between Paris and “la province.”<sup>214</sup> The novel begins by locating Célestine’s new job in Normandy, in the town of Mesnil-Roy, at a house called “Le Prieuré” (34).<sup>215</sup> The second chapter provides a description of the regional landscape, and of the town of Mesnil-Roy, of which she is highly critical. Mesnil-Roy is an unruly labyrinth, with houses at odd, unseemly angles: “Des rues sales, étroites, tortueuses, et des places où les maisons sont de guingois, des maisons qui ne tiennent pas debout, des maisons noires, en vieux bois pourri” (88). I would underscore the adjective “pourri,” because the idea of rot, decay, and corruption, here present in a physical description, will likewise appear in Célestine’s criticism of society.

Mesnil-Roy and Célestine’s new house of employment evoke a prison-like atmosphere. Célestine prefers the wide-open ocean of Brittany and the large, straight Parisian boulevards. In Mesnil-Roy, she is most often bored, and at her happiest, she describes her emotions as only “presque de la gaieté” (84). As Célestine passes by on her way to Sunday mass, she watches people inside their strange houses, trying to make their weekly quota of “chaussons de lisière” for the factories: “Et je vois, derrière des vitres, de pauvres faces chétives, des dos courbés, des mains noires qui tapotent sur des semelles de cuir” (88). Célestine takes all of this in, and declares, “On dirait une prison” (88). It is not just the fact that the poor are working on a Sunday in their small

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<sup>214</sup> “In principle, places can be mapped out, in the same way that the topological position of a city or a river can be indicated on a map. The concept of place is related to the physical, mathematical measurable shape of spatial dimensions. [...] These places in relation to their perception are called space” (Bal, *Narratology* 133). In other words, writing about Paris in fiction is to write of a place, but one can speak of the different spaces in the city. Bal’s definitions of place and space conform to those by theorists and critics in *Key Thinkers in Space and Place*.

<sup>215</sup> The name of the house is highly ironic, since a “prieuré” is a monastic community headed by a “prieur,” and it is clear that the Lanlaire household is far from being morally or ethically elevated.

rooms that suggests a penal institution, but also that the production of “les chaussons de lisière” usually takes place in correctional institutions, as the footnote tells us (497). This idea of the prison, on which Arnaud Vareille has also worked (387), is an important analogy for the novel. The carceral atmosphere that Hugo described in *Le Dernier Jour* is transferred here to places in the outside world.

Mirbeau’s contribution to this theme is to rework the resemblance of everyday spaces into prison spaces, which he does by detailing the many ways the bourgeoisie oppresses the poor and the working class. Moreover, he sexualizes the idea of jail (unlike Hugo) by often figuring spaces of domestic servitude as somewhere between the bordel and the penitentiary. These include not only the homes within which maids work, but also the institutions that house them in between jobs. One such place, Notre-Dame-des-Trente-Six-Douleurs in Neuilly, where a group of nuns cruelly exploits housemaids with promises of placement in exchange for intense labor, mercilessly refuses to place the most talented servants and keeps them against their will. The subjugated maids find solace only in late night sexual relations with each other. The name of the establishment only adds ironic hyperbole to the sisters’ infamy, since “trente-six douleurs” far exceeds the seven usually found in the names of churches.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, Neuilly’s status as an upper-bourgeois location stands in stark contrast to the sisters’ miserliness. This play on words, just one example of many, puts Mirbeau in the company of François Villon, Voltaire, and Flaubert—all writers who mock social institutions with relish and comedic talent.

One establishment likened to the brothel is the “bureau de placement” in Paris, where Madame Paulhat-Durand conducts meetings between the ladies of the house and the prospective maids. As Célestine waits for hours on end for a job lead, she recognizes the similarities between herself and prostitutes waiting for clients: “À nous voir ainsi affalées sur les banquettes, veules, le

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<sup>216</sup> “Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs” is a common name for Catholic churches, the number referring to seven painful episodes that the Virgin Mary underwent.

corps tassé, les jambes écartées, songeuses, stupides ou bavardes...[...] à entendre les successifs appels de la patronne il me semblait que nous attendions le miché [client d'une fille publique]" (351). Célestine's analogy is not far off, since brothel keepers wait just outside the office at closing time, hoping to convince the more desperate women to come work for them instead. A certain Madame Ranvet who describes her "establishment" as top-notch and even frequented by the President himself accosts Célestine. Madame Ranvet assures Célestine, who protests her lack of experience in this particular profession, that men often ask especially for maid outfits. Célestine, however, is wary of being any more exploited than she already is, having seen her mother prostitute herself out to sailors. Because Célestine remembered hearing and seeing extreme violence in her mother's bedroom, she developed an early fear of prostitution, a fear that grew when, as an adult, she heard of other women's plights and became afraid of contracting venereal diseases.<sup>217</sup>

In addition to these interior spaces, exterior spaces are of major consideration in *Le Journal*, just as they are in Zola and Maupassant. Besides appropriating prison and bordel imagery in order to critique French society for the sexual exploitation of domestic servants, Mirbeau illustrates spatio-temporal ideologies through complex imagery involving the Raillon forest and the Lanlaire's gardens. In the following section, I examine the links between Célestine's early sexual experiences and the death of Claire (a relationship not unlike that between Séverine and Louissette in *La Bête humaine*), as well as the importance of the Raillon forest in the novel's imagery. Célestine's molestation anticipates Claire's rape-murder in both the event as well as the STC elements (the use of natural elements in the description and their symbolism). I draw on a lithograph by Auguste Rodin used to illustrate Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des*

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<sup>217</sup> "J'ai eu peur, car on ne sait pas où cela vous mène... J'ai frôlé tant de misères dans cet ordre-là... j'ai reçu tant de navrantes confidences!... Et ces tragiques calvaires du Dépôt à l'Hôpital auxquels on n'échappe pas toujours !... Et pour fond de tableau, l'enfer de Saint-Lazare..." (43). Célestine has a healthy fear of contacting venereal disease, thus the mention of Saint-Lazare, the infamous Parisian hospital for prostitutes.

*Supplices* in order to show the development in the way art depicts victimhood, far different in the *fin-de-siècle* than from Prud'hon's earlier painting that I mentioned in the introduction. The dystopian landscape in which the rapes occur for both Claire and Célestine underscores the violence of the acts. I then briefly contrast the graphic sexual violence in *Le Dernier Jour* with that of one of Mirbeau's earlier works, *Sebastian Roch*—in order to demonstrate that Mirbeau's misogyny is more complex than might first appear—before turning to the many evocations of Claire's death throughout the novel. I examine these in a linear fashion to show the extent to which the STC of Claire's rape-murder contributes to the narrative's structure. Célestine, suspecting Joseph, begins her own investigation into Claire's death. Her obsessive search for the truth is predicated on her desire for Joseph, who seems much more interesting when she casts him as a murderer. Célestine builds a case for Joseph's guilt based on his abuse of animals, and I examine one scene in particular where his tortuous killing of a duck mimics his alleged treatment of Claire. Moreover, I show the links Mirbeau makes between animals, gardens, and women in a complex imagery that suggests that in this fictive and corrupt world he is portraying, women are as expendable and interchangeable as animals or plants, and thus violence done unto them (even death) is not criminal. Mirbeau thus shows the extent to which bourgeois society, in an effort to appear straight-laced and correct, hides an underbelly of corruption and vice.

### **Landscape and Sexual Violence**

In the fifth chapter, Célestine recounts her first sexual experience. Before describing what appears as a rape, she gives us a portrait of a child who was beaten, who received no love from her parents, and who engaged in sexual acts from the age of ten:

À dix ans, je n'étais plus chaste. Initiée par le triste exemple de maman à ce que c'est que l'amour, pervertie par toutes les polissonneries auxquelles je me livrais avec les petits



garçons, je m'étais développée physiquement très vite... Malgré les privations et les coups, mais sans cesse au grand air de la mer, libre et forte, j'avais tellement poussé, qu'à onze ans je connaissais les premières secousses de la puberté... Sous mon apparence de gamine, j'étais presque femme... (131-32)

“Presque femme” is also used to describe Louise Roque, and this ambiguous age for girls provides both Maupassant and Mirbeau (as well as Zola) with terrain on which to develop complicated themes of criminality and corruption, without allowing the reader to come to any easy conclusions.

Célestine then describes how she is raped at twelve years of age, though she leaves this violation ambiguous as well: “À douze ans, j'étais femme, tout à fait... et plus vierge... Violée? Non, pas absolument... Consentante? Oui, à peu près... du moins dans la mesure où le permettaient l'ingénuité de mon vice et la candeur de ma dépravation...” (132). Célestine is using the same language as she does to describe her own heart, as a mix of debauchery and tenderness. Despite her own admittance of vice, it is difficult for the reader, at least the modern one, to be quite so judgmental toward a twelve-year old girl, especially considering the circumstances of Célestine’s rape.

After Sunday mass, an old man of a higher social class (*petit bourgeois*) solicits Célestine to have sex with him right on the shoreline in exchange for an orange: “Un dimanche, après la grand'messe, le contre-maître d'une sardinerie, un vieux, aussi velu, aussi mal odorant qu'un bouc, et dont le visage n'était qu'une broussaille sordide de barbe et de cheveux, m'entraîna sur la grève, du côté de Saint-Jean” (132). While the man clearly holds a good job in the community as a foreman, his physical appearance stresses his animality (like Renardet). Célestine’s complicity is complicated by the verb “entraîner.” A young girl being lead by an older man demonstrates a clear imbalance of power and makes the young Célestine seem quite passive and without agency, meaning that the probability of consent in sexual relations with the foremen very dubious.

In a preview of Claire's rape, Célestine describes her assault using environmental cues: "Et là, dans une cachette de la falaise, dans un trou sombre du rocher où les mouettes venaient faire leur nid... où les matelots cachaient quelquefois les épaves trouvées en mer... là sur un lit de goémon fermenté, sans que je me sois refusée ni débattue... il me posséda... pour une orange!" (132). While Célestine tells the story matter-of-factly, the brutish description of the man and the unappealing circumstances make the encounter somewhat ambiguous. The fact that her defloration occurs on a Sunday after mass is another example of bourgeois hypocrisy, and the name of her attacker (Cléophas Biscouille) only adds to this point; "Cléophas" was one of Jesus's disciples that met him on the road on Easter but did not recognize him (Luke 24; 13-35). To pair such a biblical name with the name "Biscouille," or what we can see as "bis-couille," a clearly sexual reference, is both blasphemous and highly satirical.

Célestine goes on to have several more encounters with Monsieur Biscouille in the same place, and her reminiscence makes her reaction even more complicated, because she explains that she neither enjoyed these encounters nor encouraged them: "Et voilà une chose incompréhensible, dont je n'ai trouvé l'explication dans aucun roman. M. Biscouille était laid, brutal, repoussant... Et outre, les quatre ou cinq fois qu'il m'attira dans le trou noir du rocher, je puis dire qu'il ne me donna aucun plaisir; au contraire" (132). Célestine seems truly unable to understand her own experience, to comprehend how she could engage in the same sexual activity several times, and thus assumes responsibility, though her story undermines any possibility of her consent. She mentions her deflowering because she thinks of it often, and her nostalgia comes off as odd and almost humorous: "Alors, quand je repense à lui—et j'y pense souvent—comment se fait-il que ce ne soit jamais pour le détester et pour le maudire? À ce souvenir, que j'évoque avec complaisance, j'éprouve comme une grande reconnaissance... comme une grande tendresse et aussi, comme un regret véritable de me dire que, plus jamais, je ne reverrai ce dégoûtant personnage, tel qu'il était sur le lit de goémon..." (132). To think tenderly of a less than pleasant

sexual encounter on a piece of seashore littered with refuse and kelp seems preposterous and points to Célestine's own lack of consciousness. She ends this story on an even more humorous note that is the key to the satirical nature of this episode: "À ce propos, qu'on me permette d'apporter ici, si humble que je sois, ma contribution personnelle à la biographie des grands hommes..." (133). What are we to make of this passage? I would suggest that in addition to the satirical elements, the text underscores the theme of more powerful figures ("des grands hommes") taking advantage of the weak and marginalized, with little consequence. This is a motif that runs throughout Célestine's life as a domestic servant, as she recounts the many examples of housemaids picked over by their masters.

It is also significant that Célestine's first major sexual experience is one of exchange. She sleeps with the foreman because he promises to give her an orange after. Later, before a former colleague rapes Célestine, she treads on an orange peel: "j'écrasais sous mes pieds, une peau d'orange" (193)—an episode that occurs in the chapter before we learn of Claire's murder. The orange is a symbol of health and vibrancy, Protestantism, and fall colors, but most importantly it is subject to decay. The orange morphs from a ripe orange early in the novel to a rotting piece of fruit, trampled underfoot. Mirbeau creates imagery reminiscent of a baroque *vanitas*, where fruit suggests decay as the unavoidable effect of the passing of time on organic elements. Paired with skulls and other images of death, the *vanitas* as art was meant to remind us of how fleeting time is.<sup>218</sup> Oranges were frequently used in such artistic works as Harmen Steenwyck's "Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life" and in Cézanne's work. Célestine meditates on the passing of time herself at different moments in her journal, in one entry likening the figures in her memories to dust, ashes, and finally death (393-94). In another, she gazes at an old photograph

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<sup>218</sup> The name "vanitas" is taken from Ecclesiastes 1:2, "Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas." The French baroque artist Georges de la Tour frequently used *vanitas* iconography. For more information on *vanitas*, see Louis Marin. For more on the baroque as an esthetic concept, see the introduction in Marlies Kronegger and Jean-Claude Vuillemin edited work. In addition, Serge Duret explores the picaresque and the baroque in Mirbeau.

and wonders, like the song, “Que me reste-il...?” (342) of all those in her past. Mirbeau draws on older associations, renewing this classic imagery and investing it with new meanings. The ideas of replacement and decay, and their relation to sexual violence, become even more pronounced when we take into account Claire’s death.

In Chapter Eight, Célestine initially learns of Claire’s murder, which had taken place after her arrival at the Lanlares.<sup>219</sup> All of Célestine’s knowledge of the crime is second-hand, either through acquaintances or the press. Here, Célestine first hears of Claire (unnamed) from Madame Gouin: “Aujourd'hui, justement, j'ai appris, chez l'épicière, que des chasseurs avaient trouvé la veille, dans la forêt de Raillon, parmi des ronces et des feuilles mortes, le cadavre d'une petite fille, horriblement violée” (205). Célestine emphasizes natural elements in this passage, much as she did in recalling her own sexual experiences. Just as Célestine lost her virginity on a bed of kelp, stones, and seagull nests, Claire is depicted as dead among natural refuse—“des ronces et des feuilles mortes” (205). The preceding chapter laid the groundwork for this season of decay by commenting on the start of autumn: “Décidément, voici l'automne. Des gelées, qu'on n'attendait pas si tôt, ont roussi les dernières fleurs du jardin. [...] Il ne reste plus rien dans les plates-bandes désolées, plus rien que quelques maigres géraniums ici et là, et cinq ou six touffes d'asters qui avant de mourir, elles aussi, penchent sur le sol leurs bouquets d'un bleu triste de pourriture” (161). The death of these flowers anticipates Claire’s death in the details of their position and the idea of decomposition.

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<sup>219</sup> Beyond these parallels between the descriptions of their rapes, Célestine and Claire are linked by other elements. Both are on the cusp of puberty, between eleven and twelve, at the time of each incident. Both girls are linked to men whose professions suggest clearness and propriety, while their daughters are taken to remote and unmaintained spaces, man-handled far from the public road. Claire is the daughter of a “cantonnier,” one who is supposed to repair roads and keep them clear, and her killer maintains the Lanlares’s garden. Célestine’s seductor’s name—Cléophas Biscouille—has associations with the road through biblical antecedents. Moreover, the roads are important because they offer an outlet for movement. All of these parallels will become increasingly disturbing as we learn more about Claire’s end, because the same thing could very easily have happened to Célestine.

The image of autumnal plants, in relation to Claire's murder, is comparable to a lithograph by August Rodin for Mirbeau's 1902 edition of *Le Jardin des supplices*. Rodin illustrates a scene that, while reminiscent of the blood and torture found throughout *Le Jardin des supplices*, belongs more logically with *Le Journal*. The lithograph, pictured below, features a woman standing, her figure leaning against a plant, blood streaming across her torso and down her leg. In my introduction, I explained how Prud'hon's allegorical painting of crime featured a stabbed man splayed in a crucified position. In each of the texts I have studied, we find instead a young female victim, raped and murdered, her body left to decompose in a forest area. In Rodin's lithograph, the woman leans on a young tree as if to find some kind of relief or last resting place. While nature provides such a refuge in Maupassant's "La Petite Roque" and Zola's *La Bête humaine*, in *Le Journal*, nature is no haven for Claire, but rather serving to hide forever the secrets of her death. However, we can also see the analogical relationship between Rodin's female figure and the tree. Claire's body will fertilize the earth around her and feed the forest, as well as the Lanlaire's garden. Célestine, in her continual linking of Claire with the site of her death, suggests this same relationship, to the point that Claire and the forest are interchangeable, or rather, the forest stands as a synecdoche for Claire.

In some ways, Mirbeau creates a parallel between the natural landscape and the action in a fashion similar to Flaubert's pairing of a minute portrait of the forest with Emma's initial encounter with Rodolphe in *Madame Bovary*. However, by associating a dystopian landscape with the sexual experiences of young girls, Mirbeau (implicitly or explicitly) emphasizes the lack of enthusiasm and consent on the part of the girls, whereas Flaubert sought to underline Emma's orgasmic joy. Just as Mirbeau depicts in detail the gruesome backdrop to Célestine's encounters, likening the young girl to another piece of trash on the shore, the autumnal landscape of Claire's death emphasizes the theme of death.

After learning from the storekeeper some bits of information, Célestine gets the whole story from Rose (still in Chapter Eight). The violence of these points recalls in many ways the death of Louise in Maupassant's *La Petite Roque*:

D'après Rose, toujours mieux informée que les autres, la petite Claire avait son petit ventre ouvert d'un coup de couteau, et les intestins coulaient par la blessure... La nuque et la gorge gardaient, visibles, les marques de doigts étrangleurs... Ses parties, ses pauvres petites parties, n'étaient qu'une plaie affreusement tuméfiée, comme si elles eussent été forcées—une comparaison de Rose—par le manche trop gros d'une cognée de bûcheron... (205)

Claire's body is gutted like a hunted animal. This treatment of Claire as prey is also manifest poetically; Claire's body is broken up into parts in the description—first her torso, then her neck, and back down to her vaginal area. Like Maupassant's Louise, Mirbeau's Claire was strangled, but we do not benefit from a first-hand account as we did in "La Petite Roque," so we cannot know if the girl was strangled before or after being raped. This intense observation of the victim's body is, disturbingly, also a common feature in the press of this time.<sup>220</sup> References to violence in the press reinforce events in the narrative, such as when, early on, Monsieur Lanlaire points out a sadistic murder in *Le Petit Journal*: "Tiens!... encore une femme coupée en morceaux" (100).<sup>221</sup> When read against Vigarello's commentary, Monsieur Lanlaire's reaction, both comic and unsettling, suggests that the shock value of such descriptions is short-lived. With such a desensitized reading public, Mirbeau must take his portrait of Claire's death to extremes, in order

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<sup>220</sup> "La presse orchestre bien sûr le commentaire du crime, s'attardant comme jamais auparavant sur les signes morbides, relevant l'emplacement des corps, les marques du sang, détaillant la forme et l'étendue des blessures, supputant la brutalité et l'intensité des coups [...] La complaisance dans l'allusion au sang cultive la répulsion: la volonté d'indigner choisit l'extrémité. Les détails des corps mutilés semblent s'accumuler avec le recul insensible des meurtres et des assassinats durant le siècle" (Vigarello 209).

<sup>221</sup> "La femme coupée en morceaux, grande catégorie de faits divers, illustre de façon paroxystique une réalité du XIXe siècle: la rage contre une femme dont on n'admet pas l'émancipation" (Perrot, *Histoire de la vie privée* 277).

to stun those who, much like Monsieur Lanlaire, are all too familiar with the grisly *fait divers* of the daily news. In order to use Claire's death to make an overt political point, Mirbeau extends his use of her death throughout the novel as a major structural element, so that the unfazed reader cannot overlook what may seem at face value just another sad story about a dead girl in a small town.

As in Louise's rape-murder in the forest grove (Maupassant) and Louissette's death in the woods near Croix-Maufras, the environment around the victim again comes into play for Claire's death: "On voyait encore, dans la bruyère courte, à un endroit piétiné et foulé, la place où le crime s'était accompli... Il devait remonter à huit jours, au moins, car le cadavre était presque entièrement décomposé..." (205-06). Louise's body, or parts of it, has become part of the ground around her. The "ronces" and the "bruyère" surrounding her are two unmanaged natural elements, part of a wild space, uncontrolled (in comparison to domestic gardens). The use of heather, a plant that symbolizes solitude, further reinforces the marginalization of the young girl.<sup>222</sup>

Rather than react with sympathy to Claire's demise, Célestine blames the young girl for being in such a space. Célestine attributes utility to being in the Raillon forest in certain seasons, but during periods of idleness—when the forest holds no food for picking—she believes venturing there is a recipe for death: "on se rappelle que la petite Claire était toute la journée, dans la forêt... [...] Mais, à cette époque, qu'allait-elle faire dans la forêt où il n'y a plus rien à cueillir?..." (206). By not sympathizing with Claire, Célestine seems as complicit in maintaining the status quo as those above her socially.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> We are far from the poetic use of heather found in other primary literary texts, such as Hugo's seminal poem from *Les Contemplations* (1856), "Demain dès l'aube": "Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe / Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur." Mirbeau comes closer to Guillaume Apollinaire's use of the plant in "L'Adieu," from *Alcools* (1913): "J'ai cueilli ce brin de bruyère; / L'automne est morte souviens-t-en, / Nous ne nous verrons plus sur terre, / Odeur du temps, brin de bruyère, / Et souviens-toi que je t'attends."

<sup>223</sup> Likewise, the police refuse to believe Célestine's word over her employer in a dispute over unpaid wages "D'abord, Mademoiselle, on ne vous croira pas... Et c'est juste, remarquez bien... Que deviendrait la société si un domestique pouvait avoir raison d'un maître?... Il n'y aurait plus de société,

Not only does Célestine blame Claire for her own death, but she also sees rape-murders as socially acceptable, even going so far as to view them as a form of love. She recalls her own encounter with tender nostalgia: “Malgré l'horreur sincère qu'inspire ce meurtre, je sens parfaitement que, pour la plupart de ces créatures, le viol et les images obscènes qu'il évoque, en sont, pas tout à fait une excuse, mais certainement une atténuation... car le viol, c'est encore de l'amour...” (306). While this excerpt could cast Mirbeau as a misogynist, we cannot forget how important satire is in this novel.

Mirbeau, a probable victim of sexual violence who dedicated an entire novel to the subject (*Sebastian Roch*), certainly seems aware of the repercussions such acts can have on victims, far before science itself admitted to any long-term effects. Published the same year as Zola's *La Bête humaine*, *Sebastian Roch* also takes place immediately before the Franco-Prussian war. Rape is at the center of this narrative about a young boy's time at a Jesuit seminary<sup>224</sup> — “Toute l'éducation des jésuites est assimilée à un viol des âmes dans le roman, mais cette fois, il s'agit d'un viol effectif que le narrateur assimile au meurtre d'une âme d'enfant” (Ferron 287). Yet, Mirbeau describes the boy's physical violation in elliptical terms. In *Le Journal*, the description of Claire's corpse is more than concrete, the specifics being both explicit and terrifying. Why would Mirbeau make rape so graphic and violent in one novel, and so vague in another? I would consider the importance of gender here: Mirbeau is much more reticent when dealing with a male victim. In many ways, Claire's rape-murder calls for more attention because of the symbolic significance of the crime.

After Célestine learns more about Claire's death, she has her own suspicions about the perpetrator, as do others, and discussion unearths tales of other similar deaths. Rose accuses Mr.

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Mademoiselle... ce serait l'anarchie...” (306). Ironically the police officer uses the term “juste” to describe a system that repeatedly reinscribes patterns of injustice.

<sup>224</sup> One of Zola's last novels, *Vérité* (1903), involves both a false accusation of pedophilia and the cover-up of a real case of molestation. For Gilbert Chaitan, Zola's novel is a direct transposition of the Dreyfus Affair.



Lanlaire, citing a string of previous girls he has raped. However, Rose's assertion is relayed ambiguously, as she merely implies the assaults through a list of names rather than describing what happened to any of them: "Et la petite Jésusreau?... Et la petite à Valentin?... Et la petite Dougère?... Rappelez-vous donc?... (207). For the reader, the identity of each of these children, only named here (except for Jésusreau),<sup>225</sup> is her rape. Rose only lists female victims, reinforcing the sense that girls are at risk for such grisly deaths, in stark contrast to historical accounts. Despite the girls' young age, Rose clearly finds rape to be a part of life in her continued accusation of Monsieur Lanlaire: "Qu'il viole les petites filles qui consentent à se laisser violer?... mon Dieu! passe encore... Qu'il les tue?... ça n'est guère croyable" (207). Rape is not even treated as a crime, but assimilated to a sexual act, very far removed from our contemporary definition that demands a lack of consent. As we shall see, Célestine admits to her own rape, but does not see it as a crime either. While Rose suspects Monsieur Lanlaire, because of his background, Célestine suspects Joseph, for what seem very laudable reasons.

Célestine initially questions Joseph about his involvement in Claire's murder in this chapter. Significantly, she will repeat her interrogation four more times—three in relation to Claire and the last pertaining to the theft of the Lanlaire's silverware. Each iteration demonstrates a development in Célestine relationship to Joseph and a constant effort by Mirbeau to underscore the centrality of Claire's death, increasingly superimposed onto Célestine and Joseph's budding relationship. However, it is difficult to judge Joseph's guilt, because his replies to Célestine's questions are impossible to gauge. Carefully, she broaches the subject of Claire's

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<sup>225</sup> "La petite Jésusreau" is mentioned again in Chapter Six by Madame Lanlaire: "Et la petite Jésusreau?... Quinze ans, misérable !... Et pour laquelle il a fallu que je paie cinq cents francs... Sans quoi, aujourd'hui, tu serais peut-être en prison, comme ton voleur de père" (143). Madame Lanlaire's implies that she paid off the Jésusreau family to keep the affair under wraps, further underscored by Rose's assertion that the girl was almost killed by Lanlaire: "Pour la petite Jésusreau... c'est une fameuse chance, je vous assure, qu'il ne l'ait pas tuée..." (207). Thus the fact that Monsieur Lanlaire has a tendency to "trousse[r] les petites filles dans la campagne" (143) seems anything but innocent. I would underline the violence of the verb "trousser," used also by Zola in *La Terre*, to describe other sexual interactions: "Et voilà qu'un mâle l'habitait, un mâle brutal, habitué à trousser les filles au fond des fosses [...]" (225).

death with a false sense of nonchalance: “Savez-vous, Joseph, qu'on a trouvé dans la forêt la petite Claire assassinée et violée?” (208). Joseph responds in a suspicious manner, pushing Célestine to continue the conversation, but his response is also ambiguous, leading Célestine to question her own perceptions: “Tout d'abord, Joseph ne peut réprimer un mouvement de surprise—est-ce bien de la surprise?... Si rapide, si furtif qu'ait été ce mouvement, il me semble qu'au nom de la petite Claire il a eu comme une étrange secousse, comme un frisson... Il se remet très vite” (208-09). Here the “points de suspension” imply that we are witnessing each step of Célestine’s thought process. Mirbeau further communicates imprecision through the verb “sembler” and his use of the preposition “comme.”<sup>226</sup>

Chapter Eight, then, provides the initial description of Claire’s murder, Célestine’s ambivalent reaction, and her suspicion of Joseph. Chapter Nine only deepens Joseph’s abstruseness and Célestine’s assessment of Claire’s rape-murder. This chapter, which was added by Mirbeau (see p. 168), contains the most references to Claire’s murder, and is pivotal both for this reason and for the way that Célestine convinces herself of Joseph’s guilt. Célestine first remarks that the Claire case is gathering steam in the press and in local gossip, serving as a distraction more than anything: “Le viol de la petite Claire défraie toujours les conversations et surexcite les curiosités de la ville. On s'arrache les journaux de la région et de Paris qui le racontent” (215). Besides providing a remedy for boredom, the murder takes on political consequences when papers with different political leanings display a knee-jerk reaction in line

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<sup>226</sup> In this preliminary exchange, Joseph holds others responsible, the same suspects that the state will pick: “Quelques vagabonds, sans doute... quelques sales youpins” (209). But while Joseph accuses vagabonds and Jews (which he lumps together in one catch-all category of possible criminals), he declares that no one will catch the criminal because of the corrupt nature of the justice system: “Puuutt!... Vous verrez qu'on ne les pincera pas... Les magistrats, c'est tous des vendus” (209). Such a declaration evokes some admiration for the criminals who get away with it, but also vehement hate for the Third Republic, a hate that Joseph repeatedly articulates. Aligning a possible sadistic killer with certain ideological beliefs is an effective way for Mirbeau to criticize the anti-Dreyfusards. However, Joseph’s statement contrasts with his supposed respect for “l’ordre.”

with their opinions, with anti-Semitic papers scapegoating the Jews.<sup>227</sup> The justice system's handling of the case, moreover, is less than spectacular, suggesting that the government's blindness extends to its ability to function. The police are quick to accuse a marginalized figure, in this case a "colporteur," as such figures of "errance" are suspicious for their mobility, troubling the ability of the bourgeois order ability to control their comings and goings. The transfer of scapegoating from the national to the local level demonstrates the corruption of political thought in every part of French society, though no politician feels much compassion for Claire.

As we saw in Maupassant's "La Petite Roque," the ruling class pays little attention to victims of crime when they are poor and female. Mirbeau similarly illustrates how a victim's class and gender determines the chance of receiving justice: "Il paraît aussi que le procureur de la République mène l'affaire mollement et pour la forme. L'assassinat d'une petite fille pauvre, ça n'est pas très passionnant..." (219). This passage echoes what we saw in Zola's *La Bête humaine*, where the murder of Grandmorin, former head of the railroad, lead to a lengthy investigation, while a previous rape-murder of the young Louissette was filed away unsolved. The emphasis on the victim's class and gender shows the extent to which justice is parceled out accordingly. Both Zola and Mirbeau work to emphasize the lack of care for marginalized figures in society. For Célestine, there is little hope that the case will be solved, and she sees this as symptomatic of rape-murders (among other crimes) in general: "Il y a donc tout lieu de croire qu'on ne trouvera jamais rien et que l'affaire sera bientôt classée comme tant d'autres qui n'ont pas dit leur secret..." (219). The need for the government to file away cases, even if unsolved, would be less troubling if such attention to detail were not also accompanied by ineptitude and a propensity for ignoring plausible suspects.

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<sup>227</sup> "La Libre Parole dénonce nettement et en bloc les juifs, et elle affirme que c'est un 'meurtre rituel...'" (218).

Whereas the state forgets the victim, Célestine pursues her own investigation, quizzing Joseph again, but this time more vehemently. Joseph's avoidance of the subject puts Célestine on her guard: "À la cuisine, Joseph n'aime pas qu'on parle de la petite Claire. Quand Marianne ou moi nous mettons la conversation sur ce sujet, il la change aussitôt, ou bien il n'y prend pas part. Ça l'ennuie... Je ne sais pas pourquoi, cette idée m'est venue—et elle s'enfonce, de plus en plus dans mon esprit—que c'est Joseph qui a fait le coup" (220). Changing the topic of conversation is a clear sign of guilt, but only Célestine seems to notice the signs that betray Joseph's increasing unease with Claire's murder. While Célestine has no proof, this does not challenge her belief, since she values her uncanny ability to read Joseph's body language: "Je n'ai pas de preuves, pas d'indices qui puissent me permettre de le soupçonner... pas d'autres indices que ses yeux, pas d'autres preuves que ce léger mouvement de surprise qui lui échappa, lorsque, de retour de chez l'épicière, brusquement, dans la sellerie, je lui jetai pour la première fois au visage le nom de la petite Claire, assassinée et violée" (220). We see here that Célestine possesses a gift not unlike that of a Sherlock Holmes (or a Miss Marple?) for reading the indications that betray a person's guilt, a gift that eludes the police. She tries to convince herself that she is wrong, perhaps because she too is caught up with conventional bourgeois wisdom, but becomes obsessed with Joseph's guilt nonetheless, directly implicating him in Claire's death: "Voyons, Joseph, est-ce vous qui avez violé la petite Claire dans le bois?... Est-ce vous, vieux cochon?" (221). Célestine's phrasing leaves some doubt as to her intended tone—for example, it's unclear whether "vieux cochon" is said lightly or violently—but we can assume from her increasingly close relationship with Joseph that Mirbeau intended her attitude to be more cavalier. Regardless of this ambiguity, Célestine grows ever more certain of Joseph's guilt. One question we can ask ourselves is if Célestine is simply mimicking the blindness of society by believing that Joseph is a criminal because he looks and acts like one, without any decisive proof of his guilt—a question I will answer in the concluding section of this chapter.

Moving from intuition to concrete fact, Célestine considers whether Joseph could logically be considered a suspect, matching the dates of the crime with Joseph's own schedule. She has access to more information than the police, because she knows Joseph's comings and goings: "Le crime a été commis un samedi... Je me souviens que Joseph, à peu près à la même date, est allé chercher de la terre de bruyère, dans le bois de Raillon... Il a été absent, toute la journée, et il n'est rentré au Prieuré avec son chargement que le soir, tard... De cela, je suis sûre..." (221). There is some irony in the fact that Joseph went to collect decomposed earth for the garden and might have left a body to decompose for eight days in the forest. The fertilizer that Joseph brings back is metaphorically tainted with the crimes of the forest, and Joseph uses this soil to cultivate his garden. In following Voltaire's famous dictum, Joseph's garden is no less grounded in evil than bourgeois society's tainted activities.

In addition to noting Joseph's "emploi du temps," Célestine relies on her memory to recall his body language on the night of the murder, "certains gestes agités," "certains regards plus troubles" (221). But her certainty is undermined by doubt as to both the date and Joseph's physical reactions: "Mais, est-ce bien le samedi du crime que Joseph est allé dans la forêt de Raillon?... Je cherche en vain à préciser la date de son absence... Et puis, avait-il réellement ces gestes inquiets, ces regards accusateurs que je lui prête et qui me le dénoncent?..." (221). Such hesitation, reinforced by the text's punctuation, maintains the dramatic tension around Claire's murder. Célestine's doubt spreads to her own motivations and interest in Claire's murder: "N'est-ce pas moi qui m'acharne à me suggestionner l'étrangeté inhabituelle de ces gestes et de ces regards, à vouloir, sans raison, contre toute vraisemblance, que ce soit Joseph—une perle—qui ait fait le coup?..." (221). This repetition of likening Joseph to an ideal servant is necessary to reactivate the contradiction between his job and his possibly murderous habits, since his portrait would otherwise be overwhelmingly negative, making the ambiguity around his culpability less palpable.

Like Mirbeau's police, Célestine begins to respect the criminal for eluding everyone,<sup>228</sup> for "[c]ette habileté de l'assassin à ne pas laisser derrière soi la moindre preuve de son crime" (221). Such high regard takes away from much of the objectivity Célestine may have as an amateur detective,<sup>229</sup> but she continues this work, questioning Joseph explicitly about the date of the murder: "Joseph, quel jour avez-vous été chercher de la terre de bruyère, dans la forêt de Raillon?... Est-ce que vous vous le rappelez?..." (222). Her rational manner of questioning contrasts with her internal debates regarding Joseph's guilt. She becomes even more insistent and precise when he hesitates. What began as a cavalier discussion takes on an aggressive tone as Celestine becomes personally invested in Joseph's guilt or innocence: "Le samedi où l'on a trouvé le cadavre de la petite Claire dans le bois?... poursuis-je, en donnant à cette interrogation, trop vivement débitée, un ton agressif" (222). For the moment, it is unclear whether Célestine is pursuing this line of questioning for her own interest or for the greater good, but it soon becomes evident that it is the former, once she is firmly convinced of Joseph's involvement. Whatever the case, Mirbeau's careful development of Célestine's thoughts about Joseph's guilt, as well as her obsessive investigation, continually puts Claire at the center of the novel, even more so when analogies develop between Joseph's animal cruelty and Claire's violent death.

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<sup>228</sup> Far from being humbled, judges grudgingly admire the perpetrator for his power to escape them: "Il paraît que ce crime fait l'admiration des magistrats et qu'il a été commis avec une habileté surprenante, sans doute par des professionnels... par des Parisiens..." (219).

<sup>229</sup> Célestine is aware that her desire for Joseph is linked to her suspicion of him as a murderer. This suspicion leads to an extensive amount of what can only be called detective work. She mulls over the misdeeds continually, even if they do not directly affect her, having taken place before her arrival. She goes so far as to snoop into Joseph's room and to interrogate him in detail about the two offenses she believes he committed. Yet, while Célestine searches, she does not seem to want to find any definitive answers, as if she were working only to maintain her fantasy of Joseph rather than trying to convict him. Her image of him is that of a smooth criminal who can easily outwit the police and society. Traditional crime fiction scholarship does not include Célestine as a detective, though using Maurizio Ascari's categorization (see 33-34), we can relegate her to the group of amateur detectives found in literary works. Célestine makes herself more than questionable as a reliable objective detective who can decide on Joseph's guilt or innocence, Mirbeau accomplishes this in a concerted effort in order to show the complexity of reality, thereby offering a critique of positivism.

Célestine recalls Joseph's torture of animals as a further sign of his guilt, and the link between death and pleasure becomes clearer: "Si, pourtant... Voici un fait... un fait réel... un fait horrible... un fait révélateur... Celui-là, je ne l'invente pas... je ne l'exagère pas... je ne l'ai pas rêvé... il est bien tel qu'il est... Joseph est chargé de tuer les poulets, les lapins, les canards. Il tue les canards, selon une antique méthode normande, en leur enfonçant une épingle dans la tête..." (223). She insists on her ability to recall this fact, as if to convince herself. Joseph's method is cruel to the extreme, drawing out the dying animal's suffering for his own pleasure: "Il pourrait les tuer, d'un coup, sans les faire souffrir. Mais il aime à prolonger leur supplice par de savants raffinements de torture; il aime à sentir leur chair frissonner, leur cœur battre dans ses mains" (223). This excerpt reads as a textbook definition of sadism.<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, Joseph *measures* the animal's pain; he likes to "compter [...] leur souffrance" (223). More suffering allows Joseph more pleasure. Joseph even believes that the animal's pain makes the blood taste better. With "une joie sauvage," Joseph relates that "tant plus qu'il souffre, tant plus que le sang est bon au goût..." (224). Joseph's actions are likened to an emotionless automate, reminding us of many characters' states of mind (particularly Misard's) in *La Bête humaine*. Célestine recalls that: "Une fois, j'ai assisté à la mort d'un canard tué par Joseph... Il le tenait entre ses genoux. D'une main il lui serrait le col, de l'autre il lui enfonçait une épingle dans le crâne, puis tournait, tournait l'épingle dans le crâne, d'un mouvement lent et régulier... Il semblait moudre du café..." (223). As Célestine looks for signs of Joseph's complicity in Claire's death, our witness of the duck's slow death replaces our failure to witness Claire's suffering:

L'animal avait dégagé des genoux de Joseph ses ailes qui battaient, battaient...

Son col se tordait, même maintenu par Joseph, en affreuse spirale... et, sous le

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<sup>230</sup> M.J. MacCulloch, M.J., P.R. Snowden, P.J. Wood, and H.E. Mills define sadism as "the repeated practice of behavior and fantasy which is characterized by a wish to control another person by domination, denigration or by inflicting pain for the purpose of producing mental pleasure and sexual arousal [...] in the sadist" (22).

matelas des plumes, sa chair soubresautait... Alors Joseph jeta l'animal sur les dalles de la cuisine et, les coudes aux genoux, le menton dans ses paumes réunies, il se mit à suivre, d'un œil hideusement satisfait, ses bonds, ses convulsions, le grattement fou de ses pattes jaunes sur le sol..." (224)<sup>231</sup>

I agree with Ziegler's reading of this scene that pairs the gash made on the animal with that made to Claire's body (*The Nothing Machine* 142). I would go even farther, however, and argue that, like this suffering creature, Claire is left to die alone in the forest, the animal's convulsions metaphorically figuring the fight Claire may well have put up, a scene to which we are never privy as readers.

For Célestine, this memory of the duck's torture only confirms her suspicions of Joseph, and she tells him as much when she accuses him openly. Once Célestine has convinced herself of Joseph's guilt she calms down, a testament to her lack of sympathy for Claire: "Maintenant je suis plus calme, parce que j'ai la certitude, parce que rien ne peut m'enlever désormais la certitude que c'est lui qui a violé la petite Claire, dans le bois" (225). Her interest in Claire's death has little to do with truth and justice, and more to do with her own sexual interest in Joseph. Célestine is attracted to Joseph because she suspects him of murder. This becomes even clearer when, at the end of the chapter, Claire meets Joseph in the saddle room. As they near a possible sexual encounter, Célestine reminds herself of Claire: "Joseph se leva, referma la porte qui était restée entr'ouverte, m'entraîna au fond de la sellerie. J'eus peur, une minute... La petite Claire, que j'avais oubliée, m'apparut sur la bruyère de la forêt, affreusement pâle et sanglante..." (228). Reminding the reader of Claire, in such explicit bodily detail, makes an otherwise ordinary

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<sup>231</sup> Maupassant also explores violence against animals in the collection, *La Petite Roque*. Furthermore, Maupassant places tales about animal cruelty ("Sur les chats" [1886]) next to stories about criminal behavior ("La Petite Roque"), transposing Mirbeau's methods for the novel onto the short story. Grandadam reminds us that Maupassant likewise uses animal cruelty in his novel *Une Vie* (1883) as a way to anticipate Count Fourville's criminal vengeance (see footnote 78, 154).



encounter more sinister. This graphic apparition recalls Louise's appearance to Renardet in a series of hallucinatory visions in "La Petite Roque."

As Joseph offers Célestine the chance to go away with him and open a seaside café, she recasts the forest rape-murder yet again, but this time her fascination endangers her own safety: "Joseph répéta, de cette même bouche qui avait baisé les plaies sanglantes de la petite Claire, en me serrant avec ces mêmes mains qui avaient serré, étouffé, étranglé, assassiné la petite Claire dans le bois" (232). Moving on from questioning Joseph's involvement from a distance, Célestine now seeks to play out Claire's death, though her fantasy does not lead to anything beyond a make-out session. In the days that follow, as Célestine considers Joseph's offer, she finds that she is not revolted by him and almost uses the thought of Claire as a test to see if she becomes frightened: "Cet homme me donne des frissons... et je n'ai pas de dégoût... Et c'est une chose effrayante que je n'aie pas de dégoût, puisque c'est lui qui a tué, qui a violé la petite Claire dans le bois!..." (232). Célestine seems to be disgusted with herself for not caring about Claire, an attitude that she accepts as she does so much in life.

One would think that after this point there would be no further need to recall Claire's murder, since it has served its purpose in bringing together Joseph and Célestine. However, references to Claire continue to pepper further chapters, indicating a greater narrative importance. At the beginning of Chapter Eleven, Célestine starts by saying that the Claire case has been forgotten by everyone but her: "Maintenant, il n'est plus question de la petite Claire. Ainsi qu'on l'avait prévu, l'affaire est abandonnée" (261). By referencing this event at all, Mirbeau does not allow the reader to forget Claire. Célestine then personifies the Raillon forest as keeping a secret, along with Joseph: "La forêt de Raillon et Joseph garderont donc leur secret, éternellement" (261). By pairing the Raillon forest with Joseph, Mirbeau prepares the way for future metaphors in the text. Célestine compares the death of Claire to an animal more explicitly than above: "De celle qui fut une pauvre petite créature humaine, il ne sera pas plus parlé désormais que du

cadavre d'un merle, mort, sous le fourré, dans le bois" (261). We see Mirbeau's continued use of animal imagery, as in the duck's death. Claire is compared directly to the blackbird, which creates an interesting contrast between the blackbird's song and Claire's silence. Mirbeau thereby underlines Claire's loss of voice.

Society's general indifference toward Claire's death is underscored by descriptions of life going on in Mesnil-Roy. Furthermore, the importance of Claire's father's profession is proven by another mention that contrasts the forgotten Claire with the town's continued activity: "Comme si rien ne s'était passé, le père continue de casser ses cailloux sur la route, et la ville, un instant remuée, émoustillée par ce crime, reprend son aspect coutumier..." (261). "Émoustiller" is not a verb that conveys great concern, but rather general titillation or exhilaration, as well as a sexual connotation. The town, like Célestine, seems to enjoy being scared, since this provides an escape from the boring everyday routine. Mirbeau adds a negative and claustrophobic air to this seeming normalcy through a description of the winter landscape that gives the town "un aspect plus morne" (261). People seclude themselves in their homes, while marginalized figures suffer outside: "Le froid très vif claquemure davantage les gens dans leurs maisons. C'est à peine si, derrière les vitres gelées, on entrevoit leurs faces pâles et sommeillantes, et dans les rues on ne rencontre guère que des vagabonds en loques et des chiens frileux" (261). In the cold winter that is life, vulnerable creatures, be they young peasant girls, animals, or the homeless, are cast away with little thought by the bourgeoisie, so clearly criticized here (as elsewhere) for protecting their own self-interest. Through Mirbeau's complex use of imagery, he suggests a powerful denunciation of Belle Époque society.

From Chapter Eleven on, we find fewer references to Claire's death, with only one mention in Chapters Fourteen, Fifteen, and Seventeen. However, this recurrent pattern keeps reminding us of Claire's story at critical moments. In Chapter Eleven, Joseph asks Célestine if she has made a decision about going with him to his seaside café, to which she again responds

with questions about Claire: “Eh bien, Joseph... dites-moi que c'est vous qui avez violé la petite Claire, dans le bois...” (265). His response continues to be ambiguous: “S'agit pas de la petite Claire... s'agit de vous...” (266). Joseph consistently changes the subject, refusing to address Claire’s murder. In Chapter Fourteen, Célestine fears that he may rescind his offer to take her to Cherbourg with him because of her suspicions: “Est-ce que les soupçons que je n'ai pu cacher, du viol, par lui, de la petite Claire, n'auraient point amené, à la réflexion, une rupture entre Joseph et moi?...” (331). Célestine’s own investigation of Joseph is what brought them closer, but she fears it may also keep them apart. In Chapter Fifteen, Joseph has left for Cherbourg, and Célestine, feeling abandoned, cannot sleep, her thoughts torn between Joseph and Claire, the two intertwined in her mind: “Je me tourne et me retourne dans mon lit, un peu fiévreuse. Ma pensée va de la forêt de Raillon à Cherbourg... du cadavre de Claire au petit café.” (342). Note the importance once again of the forest. The spatial elements are central to Célestine’s fantasy of Claire’s murder, perhaps because of the links to her own sexual experiences. His associations with Claire already taint Célestine’s possible future with Joseph, just as the Lanlaire’s greatest possession, their (stolen) silverware, taints Madame Lanlaire’s pursuit of propriety. At the end of the above description, Célestine’s image of Joseph is paired with Cherbourg and the sea, bringing the links between the couple and Claire full circle: “Et, après une insomnie pénible, je finis par m'endormir avec l'image rude et sévère de Joseph dans les yeux, l'image immobile de Joseph qui se détache, là-bas, au loin, sur un fond noir, clapoteux, que traversent des mâtures blanches et des vergues rouges” (342). The sea imagery of Célestine’s defloration finishes with a maritime destination, Cherbourg and Joseph’s future café.

In Chapter Sixteen, Célestine wonders if she has pursued the wrong man for Claire’s murder. Joseph’s gardening duties are now being undertaken by a local “sacristain,” and Célestine finds him a rather suspicious figure: “L'épicière m'a raconté qu'il avait, étant jeune, étudié pour être prêtre et qu'on l'avait chassé du séminaire à cause de son indécatesse et de son

immoralité.—Ne serait-ce pas lui qui a violé la petite Claire dans le bois?... Depuis, il a essayé un peu de tous les métiers” (392). There is little mention of this sexton, but it can be no coincidence that Mirbeau chose someone of his profession to replace the gardener. After all, a sexton is charged with keeping up the cemetery—one more space that represents the relationship between gardens and death in *Le Journal*.<sup>232</sup> Célestine’s renewed doubts serve not only to reestablish hesitation in the mind of the reader, and thereby to increase the novel’s dramatic tension, but also to remove any possibility of catharsis for the reader, who will never know for certain who killed Claire.<sup>233</sup> The discussion of the sexton also draws attention once more to the Lanlaire’s gardens. Further references to domestic gardens and analogies to animals illustrate the idea that like servants, women are replaceable.

Recurring images of animals become intertwined with human victims, like the duck’s tortured death with Claire’s. The link between animals and domestic servants dehumanizes the latter, much the same as renaming housemaids removes their identity. Célestine is renamed “Marie” by one family, and “Mary” by another. Captain Mauger eats his favorite pet ferret after Célestine challenges him and then replaces it with a new pet. Likewise, Mauger replaces his maid and mistress Rose with his niece, in both his bed and as head of his household. He comments to Célestine that “[t]out se remplace” (323). This is a key statement in the novel, and a seminal moment. Just as the process of discarding and replacing has been repeated from the beginning and

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<sup>232</sup> For further discussion of gardens in *Le Journal*, see Gantrel’s excellent article comparing Mirbeau’s novel to René Bazin’s *Donatienne* (1903). Gantrel also considers *Le Journal* in her chapter on maidservants in French fiction.

<sup>233</sup> Ziegler views Mirbeau’s refusal to structure endings in terms of resolution as a violation of the “contract linking paranoid readers to therapist-authors” (141). For Michel, Mirbeau “frustre la curiosité du lecteur, et au premier chef l’amateur des romans policiers bien ficelés, qui attend qu’on lui fournisse des certitudes et qu’on lui dévoile la clef de l’énigme [...]. C’est ainsi, par exemple, que Mirbeau se garde bien d’affirmer que Joseph est le voleur et l’assassin de la petite Claire” (Michel *OR* 350). Michel compares Mirbeau to a more scientific Zola, but the latter is not quite as logical as Michel would imply, however. In *La Bête humaine*, for example, while we are certain who murdered whom, Zola deliberately distorts concrete fact to create a more dramatic ending; the runaway train carrying soldiers to the war front would, in reality, stop after half an hour when it ran out of coal. Zola preferred to sidestep his research (and Lefèvre’s advice) in order to create the perfect ending to his novel, thus affirming his allegiance to narrative rather than to simply mimicking reality.

culminates here in Mauger's garden, so do the images of "pourriture" and fertilization come to the fore. Mauger offers Célestine the chance to replace Rose, and as he does, he turns over his flowerbeds with new fertilizer. Célestine had entered the garden, noticing the absence of all the previous flowers. While Rose died of natural causes, Mauger might as well have killed her, since he is indifferent to, if not relieved by, her death. How the Captain treats his flowerbeds mirrors his treatment of Rose's death. If Rose is a name like any other, she can be replaced easily, by either Célestine or another woman.

The analogy between maids and fertilized earth goes even further than this garden scene. Earlier, Célestine likened domestic servants to "l'engrais humain" (315). The bourgeoisie uses and discards servants like commercial goods. Whatever their utility, it cannot hold. This is what is so hard about their "métier," as one employer explains at the "bureau de placements": "Votre métier, ma fille—proféra sévèrement la dame—est de faire ce que vous commandent vos maîtres..." (360). Servants are only as useful as they are flexible in response to the demands of their employers, however improper these be.

One last crime remains in the novel's closing chapter, when another mysterious assailant steals the Lanlares's prized silver, and this final crime again brings together the text's main characters and sexual violence through complex imagery. The emphasis is put on the almost religious sanctity of the silverware, "arrachées de leur mystérieux et inviolable tabernacle" (277). Célestine exults in the Lanlares' loss as a kind of punishment, but the description of her happiness associates this pleasure with that of a sexual assault: "C'est comme une brutale secousse, dans tout mon être physique, à la fois pénible et délicieuse, *un viol douloureux et pâmé de mon sexe...*(435; my emphasis). Célestine's description of a physical violation is not far off from that of Claire's mutilated vagina, likened by Rose to having been "forcé[e] [...] par le manche trop gros d'une cognée de bûcheron" (205). The critic Kalai links Claire and Célestine through the theft of the Lanlares' silverware, which helps to establish Joseph in Cherbourg. I

would argue instead that this theft is as ambiguous as Claire's death. Célestine suspects Joseph for the last time, and in her questioning of him she pairs Claire with this felony. This is extremely important, since Célestine has formed yet another association between two crimes, in this case one related to her fantasy of Joseph and one that could offer her a more bourgeois future.<sup>234</sup> "Dites-moi, Joseph, que c'est vous qui avez violé la petite Claire dans le bois... Dites-moi que... c'est vous qui avez volé l'argenterie de Madame..." (440-41). Joseph's response is ambivalent to the end, avoiding discussions of past criminal matters as if they were always instantly erased and irrelevant.

The chapter ends with the police finding no clue regarding who stole the Lanlaire's silver, and Célestine compares this theft to the search for Claire's rapist. Once again, Célestine evokes the secrets hidden by nature, as the police search the grounds around the house: "Mais la terre était sèche et dure; il fut impossible d'y découvrir la moindre empreinte, le moindre indice. La grille, les murs, les brèches des haies gardaient jalousement leur secret" (439). The landscape is as unreadable as Joseph. Célestine then links the theft of the silverware to Claire's rape-murder: "*De même que pour l'affaire du viol*, les gens du pays affluèrent, demandant à déposer. [...] Bref, l'enquête demeura vaine. Nulle piste, nul soupçon..." (439; my emphasis). We thus find three references in *Le Journal* to nature guarding a secret, here in the last chapter, and earlier in two references to the Raillon forest. Mirbeau depicts the Lanlaire's garden, which is really Joseph's garden, as unreadable and unwilling to give up any clues, just like the untamed wilderness.<sup>235</sup> The forest as a place of secrets is certainly not a new metaphor, but Mirbeau reinvigorates this cliché

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<sup>234</sup> In Chapter Eleven, Célestine anticipated the links between the silver and rape. The servants undertake their annual cleaning under "les yeux de Madame devant son argenterie... devant le viol de son argenterie par nos mains!" (277).

<sup>235</sup> In the last pages of the novel, Célestine anxiously awaits a pending discussion with Joseph about a proposal he has for her: "J'imagine des tragédies, des escalades nocturnes, des pillages, des couteaux tirés, des gens qui râlent sur la bruyère des forêts" (451). Her guesses beforehand show the extent to which Claire and the forest have become interchangeable in her mind; any evocation of wooded elements now suggests sexual violence. In fact, Joseph just wants Célestine to don an Alsatian costume to attract more clientele, and she is fiercely disappointed. Joseph's request does not, however, leave the reader any solace at the novel's end, because there is never any clear indication of his innocence.

by linking the woods to the cultivated garden. Joseph brings sylvan earth to the flowerbeds, making the garden dependant on the forest in order to flourish. So we can say that just as the bourgeois garden profits from a marginalized space (earth from the Raillon forest), the servant may well profit from the forest as the perfect spot to commit a crime. As he plots plantings, he plots murder. In this way, like Maupassant, Mirbeau draws on and renews older associations with natural spaces in order to make broader points. Both writers revitalize the mystery associated with the few spots of wilderness left as industrialization makes its final inroads into the most rural of areas in France.

Up to this point, I have insisted on the ambiguity surrounding Joseph's involvement in Claire's murder. I would like to nuance this position by discussing the satirical portrayal of Joseph as a miscreant. Paired with the seriousness of Claire's murder, the irony used in presenting Joseph shows Mirbeau to be clearly at home with mixing genres, as we will see in the concluding section of my study of *Le Journal*.<sup>236</sup> Just as Mirbeau denaturalizes crime and criminals (and victims) through word play and evacuates such words of their meaning, in so doing, he also experiments with criminological theory through his portrait of Joseph. *Le Journal* devotes considerable space to Joseph's character, in fact much more than the serialized version of the novel. Through Joseph, Mirbeau condemns the hypocrisy of high society. Investigating Mirbeau's use of satire in *Le Journal* helps us to apprehend the function of sexual violence in the text.

### **Portrait of an Artist as a Criminal**

In the relatively new field of criminology, theory targets marginal figures such as the vagabond. Yet, the villains in Mirbeau are not marginal figures. As Vigarello states, we see

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<sup>236</sup> "Mirbeau refuse la distinction des genres, parce que le comique et le tragique sont indissociablement mélangés dans la vie: tout dépend du regard que l'on porte sur les choses. L'humour, par exemple, permet de se distancier et de rire de ce qui est d'ordinaire source d'angoisse. Mais il est précisément l'apanage des 'âmes hautes'" (Michel, *OR* 1239).

criminals coming from the best parts of society—mayors, judges, men of good family—as well as having conduct that belies unlawful activity—the perfect servant or child. By reversing the social classification of offenders, Mirbeau mocks criminological theory. By looking more closely at the way authors describe such characters and their acts, it is possible to establish a link between the author’s political ideology and his representation of society through the use of a lexicon of degeneration. This lexicon functions as a metaphor for political and institutional corruption.

Célestine herself becomes obsessed by crime—the crimes she dreams of committing (“*Quelquefois, en coiffant mes maîtresses, j’ai eu l’envie folle de leur déchirer la nuque, de leur fouiller les seins avec mes ongles*” [121]),<sup>237</sup> the crimes for which she claims to be responsible (the death of Monsieur Georges, a young lymphatic man killed by his own desire), and the crimes committed by others, like Joseph. Joseph, the supposed perfect servant, is perhaps in reality not only a murderer, but also a talented thief. Through him the discourse of crime finds its apotheosis, but several satirical turns reveal a more complex—and mocking—view of criminological discourse. As we have seen, Célestine suspects Joseph immediately as the perpetrator of Claire’s death and later of the theft of her employer’s silver, unlike the local officials. Her doubts are first provoked on witnessing Joseph’s repeated violence, notably in his cruel treatment of animals. When Célestine hears of Claire’s murder committed just previous to her coming to the Lanlaires, she immediately focuses her attention on proving whether or not Joseph is the guilty party.

Far from distancing her from Joseph, however, Célestine’s suspicions draw them closer, as she develops an attraction for him. She prefers scoundrels because of their honesty, and she compares them directly to the hypocritical bourgeoisie: “*Si infâmes que soient les canailles, ils ne le sont jamais autant que les honnêtes gens*” (224). Joseph’s guilt is all the more important for

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<sup>237</sup> Célestine is not the only servant who dreams of killing her employers. An episode recalled from her past relates a conversation among servants during a bourgeois marriage celebration. As servants playfully ponder what gifts they would give the happy couple, suggestions range from vitriol to clawing out their eyes (271-72).



Célestine because he outwardly appears “un honnête homme” (224). Without a criminal past, Joseph would just be an ordinary gardener. Curiously, Célestine is seduced rather than disgusted by the stories she hears of the rape-murder of a young peasant girl prior to her arrival. She very carefully builds a fantasy around Joseph’s probable role in the murder. She connects crime to beauty, exclaiming that “un beau crime m’empoigne comme un beau mâle” (372). Mirbeau continues the mixing of genres here by pairing the beautiful with the ugly. When Célestine kisses Joseph, she feels as if she is kissing a cadaver, but this gruesome image is eroticized in the text. Rather than see the portrayal of rape in *Le Journal* as an example of Mirbeau’s misogyny, I consider it further proof of the ambiguity with which he imbues his novel.

Throughout the text, Célestine is obsessed with Joseph’s mysterious character. From first meeting him at her new job in the countryside at the Lanlaire’s household, she finds that he has a “tempérament criminel” (191). Joseph, a gardener, is that rare servant who “respects his masters” and does not try to usurp their power. Ironically, he serves as the only example in the text of a servant who claims to be content with existing social hierarchies. But while Joseph respects “l’ordre,” he maintains the life-long ambition of opening a seaside tavern, a goal he finances through the probable theft of his employers’ silverware. Order, for Joseph, is the government, the army, and patriotism. But the portrayal of Joseph’s love for control is so negative that it denounces nationalism, particularly its anti-Semitic elements. The novel links Joseph’s vicious anti-Semitism with his violent temper. Each evening after dinner, he reads the anti-Semitic newspaper *Libre Parole*, feeding his hate.<sup>238</sup> He distributes propaganda regularly, and he dreams of running a port café with the slogan “J’aime l’armée.” For Célestine, Joseph’s hate is part of his physical force, and her attraction to him is linked to his hyper-masculinity—or, as Ziegler puts it,

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<sup>238</sup> “Il a accroché dans sa sellerie, les portraits du pape et de Drumont; dans sa chambre, celui de Déroulède. [...] Précieusement, il collectionne toutes les chansons antijuives, tous les portraits en couleur des généraux, toutes les caricatures de ‘bouts coupés.’ Car Joseph est violemment antisémite... Il fait partie de toutes les associations religieuses, militaristes et patriotiques du département. [...] Quand il parle des juifs, ses yeux ont des lueurs sinistres, ses gestes, des férocités sanguinaires... Et il ne va jamais en ville sans une matraque” (137).

his “hyperbolic masculinity” (*The Nothing Machine* 141)—as well as his possible involvement in Claire’s murder. While Joseph is the most probable perpetrator in Claire’s murder, the government overlooks him, preferring to focus on drifters and prowlers. For McCaffrey, Joseph’s nationalism is what protects him from suspicion in the murder of Claire as well as the stolen silver: “[S]on amitié avec les autres fidèles du nationalisme, notamment les prêtres et le système judiciaire, le met à l’abri de tous les soupçons et lui évite même de s’inquiéter du meurtre d’une petite fille du voisinage” (100). For the government, to be “sans feu ni lieu” is a much clearer indication of potential criminal behavior than the actions of a devoted servant like Joseph.

It is essential to underline the ambiguity regarding Joseph’s guilt or innocence in these crimes, an ambiguity that Mirbeau takes great pains in his narrative to emphasize. Luis Buñuel’s 1964 cinematographic adaptation eliminated much of the doubt surrounding the character of Joseph, inserting scenes that made it clear he had killed “la petite Claire.”<sup>239</sup> Where Mirbeau focuses on deconstructing the notion of “crime” and “criminal,” Buñuel emphasizes sadism through the certainty of Joseph’s guilt and Célestine’s subsequent complicity through her silence. But whether Joseph is guilty or not is of little importance, in the end, for our understanding of the novel. More significant is Célestine’s apparent need for Joseph’s guilt. By way of her journal account, we witness her character’s desire to cultivate a criminal image of Joseph, an image that is unstable and that ultimately shifts.

This characterization of Joseph recalls another famous Joseph—Joseph Vacher, one of the most famous murderers in French history. Known as the French equivalent of Jack the Ripper (“Jacques l’Éventreur”), Vacher was accused of having raped and killed more than a dozen young

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<sup>239</sup> Lloyd describes how the film irrevocably alters the ambiguity of Joseph’s guilt, citing Hollywood’s morality (62-64): “Nothing in Mirbeau’s novel justifies the modifications introduced by Buñuel and his scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, when they show us Joseph mishandling the murder victim Claire in the kitchen, to establish a linking motivation absent from the book, and subsequently cast Célestine in the unexpected role of detective and informant, when she visits the scene of the crime and drops a metal stud from Joseph’s boot in a fruitless attempt to incriminate him” (64).

shepherds (of both sexes) between 1895 and 1897.<sup>240</sup> He was tried and found guilty, and then condemned to death. Is the naming of Mirbeau's main male character a simple coincidence? Clearly not, given the lengthy novelistic description of the little Claire's murder, committed in much the same fashion as Vacher's atrocious killings. Vacher's profile was as follows: he would kill a young shepherd, who was later found dead in an isolated rural spot, his or her genitalia destroyed with a knife. Lacassagne, the doctor who provided medical expertise for the Vacher case, subsequently penned a book about Vacher following his execution, *Vacher l'Éventreur et les crimes sadiques* (1899). Whether Mirbeau knew or read of this text is less important than the fact that two years following Vacher's death in 1898, his acts still garnered enough interest to warrant the publication of Lacassagne's nonfictional work, suggesting that the public still had his case in mind when Mirbeau published *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* in 1900. Such an informed audience would have been able to see in Joseph a parody of Joseph Vacher, while today many of the ironic elements have been lost.

In Célestine's diary, Joseph greatly resembles conventional Lombrosian descriptions of criminals, in both behavior and physical traits. His face is marked by a strange "rictus" (53), a "regard gênant" (54), all classic signs of the unlawful degenerate in Lombroso's case studies. Physically, Joseph is repeatedly compared to a primitive animal. His "souplesse" (54) allows him to suddenly appear out of nowhere, like a reptile. Célestine's journal continually attests to his corporal strength: "Son dos aussi me fait peur et aussi son cou large, puissant, bruni par le hâle

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<sup>240</sup> Erik Larson has suggested that Americans lost a certain innocence with a series of murders committed in 1893 by H. H. Holmes at the same time (and in the same neighborhood) as the Chicago World's Fair. The killer took advantage of the city's anonymity and the increase in single female tourists in his hotel of horrors. Holmes killed several women (and some children), and then sold their cadavers to universities, who paid very dearly for a resource that they were sorely lacking for their research. Vigarello alludes to the Holmes affair as an example of a prescient moment in the emergence of close ties between news and the press: "L'originalité de l'affaire Vacher, comme celle de l'affaire Jack l'Éventreur à Londres ou celle de l'affaire Holmes à Chicago, survenus quasiment dans la même décennie, tient d'abord à une intense mobilisation de l'opinion, à la volonté de la presse de franchir les frontières locales, celle de relayer les sentiments et émois collectifs au point de donner l'illusion, dans le cas français, de pouvoir offrir une tribune à l'accusateur ou à l'accusé" (230). The nickname for Vacher was "Vacher l'Éventreur," drawing obvious parallels with Jack the Ripper.

comme un vieux cuir, raidi de tendons qui se bandent comme des grelins. J'ai remarqué sur sa nuque un paquet de muscles durs, exagérément bombés, comme en ont les loups et les bêtes sauvages qui doivent porter, dans leurs gueules, des proies pesantes" (185). Joseph's strength is superhuman and beastlike. Moreover, his red hair is another characteristic that connotes criminality in Lombroso as well as literature, historically.<sup>241</sup>

Above all, Lombroso sees tattoos as the ultimate mark of a criminal: "Forensic medicine should recognize that in the case of the criminal man, who is in constant struggle against society, tattoos—like scars—are professional characteristics" (62). Apart from his natural physical traits, Joseph has numerous tattoos that suitably impress our narrator Célestine. She describes them as being located on his forearm and consisting of "cœurs enflammés, poignards croisés, au-dessus d'un pot de fleurs" (288). The flowerpot symbolizes Joseph's work as gardener, the knives suggest violence, a violence of which Joseph seems capable, but that the text leaves ambiguous. However, given that Joseph's tattoos do not match with the examples in Lombroso's book, what emerges is a parody of criminology. Mirbeau's comic treatment of Joseph's tattoos lead us to question other passages in which Joseph figures, that appear exaggerated to the point of satire and thus indicative of the deteriorating belief in atavist descriptions of criminals. All the depictions show the extent to which the language of criminality has been absorbed into the popular lexicon. What makes his portrait even more comic is that Joseph, while appearing as the very image of masculine virility, refuses Célestine's advances in an explicit manner, preferring to wait for marriage. His sudden concern with social conventions (wanting to marry Célestine before having sex) is certainly out of place with other parts of his character, contrasting strongly with the supposed criminal behavior described by Krafft-Ebing and other sexologists. Such a contrast,

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<sup>241</sup> Connotations of reddish colors as negative date from medieval period: "The animals with striped coats [...], or spotted ones [...], line up on the side of the animals with red coats, [...] and constitute the clan of liars, thieves, lechers, and money grubbers. For animal society as for human, to be red-haired, striped, or spotted amounts to almost the same thing" (Pastoureau 24).

then, produces additional comic effects. Mirbeau openly mocks criminal “signs,” manipulating the semiotics of criminality all the more to criticize the state. How do we reconcile Joseph’s hate, his desire for “ordre,” and the heinous crime he may have committed? And once we have done that, what does this say about the function of this criminal portrait beyond its comic relief? The text implies that what links all of these elements is power.

That Joseph most likely raped and murdered a young girl is just one example in the novel of the strong taking advantage of the weak. Mirbeau’s writing often contains contradictions: he condemns social injustices, but at the same time expresses misogyny. I hold that this complexity is far from a rare trait, that many writers of the period, including Zola and Maupassant, paint fiery portraits of French society, while also maintaining gendered norms. Armed with most exterior signs of criminality, Joseph stays hidden from social justice. Mirbeau’s use of atavistic theory can be contrasted with Zola’s in *La Bête humaine*, where the police erroneously pursue the naïve brute, Cabuche, because he fits the perfect portrait of a criminal, (though his angelic disposition is closer to that of John Coffey in the film *The Green Mile* [1999]). Zola prefers the tragic to the comic in his characterization of Cabuche’s fatal end. What can we make of the fact that Joseph visibly displays all the marks of a criminal, yet eludes the police? Joseph is an example both of the inefficacy of state institutions and of the inadequacy of criminal theory. Moreover, once he attains his dream of owning a marine tavern, all atavist signs vanish and he is relegated to petit-bourgeois respectability. Notably, this transition is left unexplained. Joseph remains physically aggressive, assaulting a tavern client, but sexual aspects of his violence are no longer emphasized and all but disappear. Célestine seems somewhat dissatisfied about her lot in life (one almost wishes for a sequel), and though this is by no means a providential plot, she is married in the end. Mirbeau creates a great deal of ambiguity that prevents any catharsis for the reader, and likewise troubles any Manichean vision of society.

## Conclusion

Twice weekly I pass a mock crime scene set up by my university's forensic science program. Yellow tape delimits a prescribed area, as in television crime shows. I have sometimes viewed several students there in protective garb filming and photographing their own foray into crime analysis of the grounds around a house surrounded by the crime scene barricade tape. Forensic photography can be traced back to the early twentieth century in France to Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), who first set about creating ways to preserve the crime scene in photographs (see Thomas 121-23). We can see evidence of the new practice of preserving crime scenes in "La Petite Roque" when the mailman who discovers Louise's body assiduously avoids disturbing the corpse or anything around it (though he had already picked up a stray toy before coming upon Louise), indicative of the extent to which criminology had made its way into the popular vernacular and practices. Bertillon is an apt reference for this study as well because of his earlier work in the 1880s developing anthropometry, a way of identifying criminals through measurement. For Zola and Mirbeau, Bertillon would have been symptomatic of the corruption of the French judiciary given his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair, in which he was called on to give expert testimony (falsely) authenticating Alfred Dreyfus' handwriting, thereby sealing the prosecution's case against Dreyfus.<sup>242</sup>

Each of the texts in this study delimits its particular "lieu de crime" in innovative ways, marking new developments in the history of narrative. Rather than focus on the crime scene, Hugo portrayed the "lieu du criminel," parodying his political opponents (de Maistre) and

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<sup>242</sup> Maupassant died a year before Dreyfus was accused of treason, but given his own denunciation of corrupt power structures in "La Petite Roque," we can conjecture that he would have become a Dreyfusard, like Zola and Mirbeau.

experimenting with narrative form at the same time. While Hugo did not focus on sexual violence in *Le Dernier Jour*, his portrayal of carceral spaces can be directly linked to the spatio-temporal poetics of naturalists, including the representation of unsympathetic state workers who have become hardened to the plight of suffering victims (the criminal being the victim in Hugo's novel), the foregrounding of precise spatio-temporal measurements (clock time and the architect's intervention) in relation to incarceration and emotion, as well as the evocation of a traumatic scene, in this case anticipating the guillotine. While Hugo's novel is proleptic, the other three texts in this study are analeptic, evoking a traumatic event in the past and describing the crime scene in detail. For Hugo, the crime scene is the narrator's imminent death by capital punishment, and, through flashbacks from the narrator's childhood memories of the Place de Grève, he describes this "lieu de crime." The narrator's cell is another "lieu de crime" that is described in ways meant to indict the French state for its dehumanization of prisoners, in general, and to denounce the death penalty, in particular.

In Hugo's novel, a convict's name on the narrator's prison wall, Papavoine, killed two young boys in the Bois de Vincennes, for which he was subsequently guillotined (Borderie 438). Sexuality, and specifically homosexuality, is suggested by another wall inscription: "Encore des cœurs, avec cette inscription, caractéristique dans une prison: *J'aime et j'adore Mathieu Danvin. JACQUES*" (Hugo 292). With a few words—"caractéristique dans une prison"—Hugo refers to and then immediately dismisses a common prison experience,<sup>243</sup> in a passage that has eluded critics.<sup>244</sup> While Hugo minimizes male characters' sexual experiences that would detract from

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<sup>243</sup> For more on homosexuality in French prisons, see "Les Chevaliers de la guirlande: Cellmates in Restoration France" by Nicholas Dobelbower in *Homosexuality in French History and Culture*.

<sup>244</sup> What makes this lapse significant is that the same erasure of homosexuality exists in *Claude Gueux*. Hugo focuses on Gueux's violence, but ignores the sexual relationship he shared with Albin, another prisoner. Just as Hugo writes out Gueux's sexuality, he minimizes his violence for a larger political goal to make Gueux appear more sympathetic, and thus to lend credibility to Hugo's argument against the death penalty. Sobanet notes that in *Claude Gueux* Hugo uses "his skills as a writer of fiction to transform actuality into a compelling prison narrative that promotes a distinct sociopolitical message" (15). Hugo's erasure of Claude's sexual relationship with another prisoner is necessary in order for Hugo to promote

conventional heterosexual norms, for women he does not shy away from the literary representation of sexuality or sexual violence in *Notre-Dame de Paris*'s treatment of Esmeralda under the hands of Frollo. Taken all together, these texts offer a path toward the continued focus on violence and sexuality that will reach a fever pitch in naturalist fiction. However, Hugolian violence is part of the action, not the narrative, and it fails to function on further levels. In contrast, Zola, Mirbeau, and Maupassant will each place a single violent sex crime at the heart of their narratives and continually refer back to it. In Hugo, single instances of aggression, sexual or otherwise, are not reiterated.<sup>245</sup>

Sexual violence against young girls is not at issue in Hugo's *Le Dernier Jour* (unlike the naturalist narratives under consideration in this dissertation), but he does use the figure of young girls to critique the state. Massin notes that "[l]a jeune fille est un fil essentiel" (661). The shocking contrast between children and a complete lack of innocence is a fundamental point for the role of the victim in my study, as the young girls that are targets of rape-murder in naturalist fiction likewise represent both the sublime and the grotesque. Whereas Hugo depicts the language of a young girl as a loss of innocence, naturalist narratives pair young girls with disturbing sexual experiences in the same aim.

The goal of this dissertation was to investigate the social and narrative function of sexual violence in representative texts from Zola, Maupassant, and Mirbeau. Each of the texts under examination included the rape-murder of a young peasant girl, whose death constitutes a haunting presence, returning again and again (whether through hallucination or the investigation of related crimes) as if to beseech the reader to give voice to her story. While I did not attempt to explain why sexual violence remains high in the modern period (in contrast to murder), my study sought

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social idealism and criticize the carceral institution. Gueux goes on to murder the prison warden who subsequently moved his lover to a different section of the penitentiary.

<sup>245</sup> The violent crime that resulted in the incarceration of the narrator in *Le Dernier Jour* is only hinted at vaguely; *Claude Gueux* minimizes the violence of the eponymous real-life figure; and finally, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, while including the threat of sexual violence (Frollo's obsession with Esmeralda) does not have a narrative with a developed STC of rape that follows the apparatus of naturalist fiction.



to fill the lacunae of how such violence manifests itself in literature. What emerged was the discovery of a narrative apparatus that centered on a key event that was articulated indirectly (given the impersonal narrator)—the justice system’s poor handling of sexual crimes against young girls as revelatory of deeply ingrained bureaucratic corruption. In the case of Maupassant’s “La Petite Roque,” Louise’s death was investigated by the state, but not with assiduous care (as the narrator tells us), and the judicial proceedings amount to the ultimate farce, since the town’s mayor is the unsuspected killer. In Zola and Mirbeau’s novels, both rape-murders are neither the only crimes nor the main ones. In Zola’s *La Bête humaine*, investigators, while pursuing leads in the murder of Grandmorin, discover the latter’s involvement in the death of Louisette. As each character is questioned, Louisette’s story, told in fragments, starts to become a cohesive whole. The fact that her assailant was not only killed, but did not succeed in hiding his crime, gives her justice, but the fact that Denizet (the lead investigator) buries the uncovered truth makes this justice ambiguous. However, just as Grandmorin’s buried watch haunts his killers (including one of his former victims), Zola’s text suggests—along with many of his novels—that eventually the truth will be dug up and made visible. In Mirbeau’s *Le Journal*, the death of Claire is not officially investigated. Instead, Célestine pursues her own amateur investigation, and not for the most moral ends either, as she is guided by her own desire for the presumed killer, Joseph. When she makes tepid attempts to inform the local police of her suspicions, the sluggish pace of the judicial bureaucracy leaves no doubt that no one cares about little Claire besides Célestine, who continues to think of her and reimagines her death when everyone else has stopped gossiping about possible perpetrators. Moreover, when other characters reveal the many other young victims in the local area, it becomes clear that the murder of a poor young girl does not attract attention from the authorities, as if these young girls were disposable, as disposable as the maids that are taken advantage of each day.

I argue that these texts represent a pivotal change in the representation of sexual violence in literature. The structure of my arguments rested on three key changes in Belle Époque literature. First, of the several figures invented in the nineteenth century, much critical writing has focused on the criminal, but the “violeur” and the sexually sadistic criminal has been less explored, as well as his victim (the rape victim) and the crime (rape-murder), despite the number of works that include sexual violence throughout the century, from Sue to Mirbeau. Secondly, unlike previous works, such as in Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*, the victim of rape does not speak with her own voice in the works of Zola, Mirbeau, and Maupassant. No matter how independent a character, the victim of sexual violence in late-nineteenth-century literature, most often a poor young female, does not recount the crime herself. Instead, a narrator orchestrates the scene for her (Zola, Maupassant), or other characters tell their version of the events (Mirbeau). Thirdly, sadistic crime is vastly exaggerated, used as a central narrative construct by a preponderant number of texts in comparison with its actual occurrence. In Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Esmeralda’s torture, while linked to a single sadistic individual (Frollo), is conducted under the auspices of the state. In naturalist works, seemingly everyday individuals mask a hidden life of brutal sexual crimes, and these crimes are committed privately and for their own pleasure, serving no larger purpose.

In this study, I concentrated on the *fin-de-siècle*, when literature, particularly naturalist fiction, began depicting the changing facets of everyday life and its increasing mechanization. Coinciding with the wider availability of personal timepieces, a national media that could distribute information with intense rapidity, public transportation that allowed people to cross distances in much shorter spaces of time, we find writers according prime importance to aspects of time and space. Besides considering the social aspects of these changes within literary texts, I focused on how narrative structures were affected. Since the depiction of crime in literature is

heavily dependent on descriptions, narratological theory related to time and space was of chief concern.

What is a spatio-temporal construction? I used this expression to refer to those literary scenes in which space and time are so semantically charged as to become veritable characters, not to mention the extent to which the character's behavior depends exclusively on spatio-temporal caveats. Naturalist writers broke with prior literary works by paying unusual attention to detailed recordings of time (especially clock time) and creating vividly in depth spatial descriptions. Naturalist works are usually studied in terms of their claim to portray reality, thus reinforcing gender norms even while ostensibly promoting social justice and criticizing the French state. By denaturalizing the mobility of female and male characters, we gained an appreciation for the complexity of naturalist poetics that gives us a new definition of naturalism that values literary experimentation above all else.

Figure 3.1 summarizes the use of the underlying narrative model present in the three texts studied in this dissertation. This graphic model demonstrates that the event of rape-murder, occurring before or at the beginning of these stories, is the founding event for each of these narratives. While the stories differ in some ways (the rape-murder occurs at all times of the day or night), all of the deaths take place in an uncontrolled natural space—the forest. Sub-elements of the landscape play a key role, as I demonstrated, and can be linked to associated elements (similar landscape descriptions at the time of Célestine and Claire's rapes), creating the STC's structure. Through evocation of the STC of rape-murder, the three texts use a variety of means to recall the violent death of poor, young peasant girls—during state investigations of other murders (*La Bête humaine*), through the private investigations on the part of interested characters (*Le Dernier Jour*), or through the tortured interior monologues of the criminals themselves (“La Petite Roque”).

<b>ST elements</b>	<i>La Bête humaine</i>	“La Petite Roque”	<i>Le Journal</i>
<b>Event (STC)</b>	Louissette’s rape-murder	Louise’s rape-murder	Claire’s rape-murder, autumn, [Célestine’s rape]
<b>Main Elements of Crime Scene</b>	Forest near Grandmorin’s house, mutilated corpse, nighttime	Willow grove, mutilated corpse and position of body, handkerchief, daylight	Raillon forest, mutilated corpse, afternoon
<b>Sub-elements of Crime Scene</b>	Cabuche’s hut, [ <i>chambre rouge</i> ]	Toys, Renardet’s house, Brindille river	Forest ground, brambles, heather, [Lanlaire’s garden, Mauger’s garden]
<b>Structure of Elements</b>	Undomesticated wild forest	Space of ritual, then space of fear; fight for control	Uncontrolled spaces (sea shore, forest)
<b>Narrative Position</b>	Flashback	Flashback	Beginning
<b>Evocation of Crime Scene</b>	Denizet questions witnesses; Tante Phasie; Grandmorin’s watch	State investigation; Renardet (free indirect discourse) and Louise’s ghost	Célestine hears from shopkeeper, Rose; Claire haunts Célestine
<b>Mirroring</b>	Train scene	NA	[Célestine imagines rape]
<b>Function</b>	Denounce state bureaucratic structures and functions as corrupt, using rape-murder as impetus to investigation or brought up in relation to other crimes		

Table 4-1 STC apparatus in works by Zola, Maupassant and Mirbeau

Among this study’s findings was the fact that sexual crimes structure narratives as key parts of ongoing trials in these three texts. Besides reiteration (in which the dialectic between landscape and victim is key), silenced victims (Louissette, Louise, Claire) “speak” through other means (ghost children, Grandmorin’s watch, Célestine’s imagination), hunting down killers as they were hunted (Maupassant), bringing acknowledgement of the perpetrator’s guilt (Zola), and showing corruption of bourgeois society (Mirbeau, Zola, Maupassant). Imminent justice serves as

a replacement for state justice (compromised by a corrupt system). These texts are not misogynistic, but rather highly symbolic, with supernatural justice, however ambivalent, replacing divine.

Among my study's findings, I established that while often based on real models like Joseph Vacher and Ménesclou, literary texts not only exaggerate the threat of sadistic crime, but also overwhelmingly include only female victims, as well as ignore female killers. For Jorg Waltje, these stories ignore the fact that "women serial killers comprise between 7 and 15 percent of the total" (108). Thus we find a certain contradiction among these authors who criticize the state, all the while reinforcing norms regarding class and gender. However, these authors are not completely misogynistic, because they make an important point: most violence is domestic and most people are killed by someone that they know. I underline this point because it is lost on many future works that were influenced by naturalism. Just as naturalist writers took away the voice of the rape (and rape-murder) victims in my study, authors and screenwriters in the twentieth and twenty-first century have gone on largely to perpetuate stereotypes—extreme violence, often sadistic, on the part of serial killers—that have become part of the contemporary rape script. Meanwhile, the reality is that while women are predominantly the victims of rape, they either live with or know their attacker. Most rapes are not rape-murders and are also committed with little violence, attackers instead relying on manipulation through drugs or alcohol. Sadistic rape-murder is extremely rare, while sexual assault is all too common, affecting every one in six women in her lifetime ("Statistics"). In France, women's groups continually fight against stereotypes of sexual assault that are perpetuated by the media, film, and literature. "Le violeur n'est très majoritairement *ni étranger, ni célibataire (vivant seul), ni asocial, ni impulsif*. Dans la plupart des cas, il est parfaitement intégré à la société, marié (ou vivant maritalement) avec des enfants" ("Viol: les chiffres"). If we think back to Zola's portrait of Jacques in *La Bête humaine*, it is astounding how many of these characteristics apply to him. It is clear that more

contemporary anxieties have been mapped onto the figure of the violent rapist, such as racist fears linked to immigration.

The perpetuation of the dangerous introvert may not have begun with Zola, but naturalist narratives such as his did much to forge the rape scripts we find today. This being said, we should also keep in mind how Zola pairs characters like Jacques with others like Grandmorin, who, while in some ways more sadistic than Jacques, is considered a much more respectable figure in the novel. Following the ideas suggested by these texts, authority figures appear as incapable of being guilty because this would destroy the entire system of power, a system built with a class of criminals in place before the discovery of crimes is even made, a class of powerless individuals. The poor and others become the favorite suspects, validating this system once they are judged, creating a closed and vicious circle. Certain characters, therefore, are more vulnerable to spatio-temporal constraints and punishments, whether tracked by others or victims of crimes. Reading literary texts from the canon—novels by writers such as Zola, Maupassant, Henry James and others—reinforces spatial anxieties, leading to certain expectations regarding how female characters move through their embodied literary space. Spatio-temporal anxiety can be seen in the gendered aspect of agoraphobia, since women represent almost ninety percent of those suffering from anxiety and panic attacks (see Davidson 15). Zola's depiction of a male serial killer observing possible female victims on trains (*La Bête humaine*), in a scene echoed in contemporary crime shows, makes readers more self-conscious of their own movement through commuter space.

Even while these texts treat the same theme (injustice and corruption), each expresses these ideas using different literary techniques. However, all call on the lexicon of degeneration and criminology to paint an acerbic portrait of the ruling class in France. The authors create a metaphoric link between criminal degeneration and the political corruption of France's Second Empire and Third Republic. The language of degeneration impregnates not only the scenes of

violence, but also descriptions of the institutions of power. These naturalist writers severely judge the effects of science on the judicial process. The fight between those who hold power (Renardet, Grandmorin) and those who are marginalized (Louise, her mother, Louissette, Claire, Célestine) is further illuminated by the role of nature and the fantastic that put objective science into question, as when Maupassant likens the felling of trees to a series of rape-murders, or when Mirbeau connects the torture of animals to that of “la petite Claire.”

My dissertation has broad implications for how we view representations of violence. I found that the rape script was pervasive even among authors fighting for social justice, such as Zola. Just as Bal and others suggest that there is a “rhetoric of space,” I would posit that there exists a “rhetoric of rape” that my narratological model illustrates. If rhetoric is the art of persuasion, the rhetoric of rape within these texts is trying to convince the reader of certain realities that are in fact gross exaggerations—the rape-murder of women. For Caputi, sadistic killers represent an extreme form of masculinity that she qualifies as “hypernormal” rather than “monstrous”: “The normalcy, indeed hypernormalcy, of the ‘psychopath,’ the ready identification so many men have with the sexual killer, the frequency of violence in the male-female relationship: all of these bespeak the network of phallic norms, mores, and institutions which ultimately legitimate and even command the gynocide of the Age of Sex Crime” (115). In other words, it is not possible to question masculinity because men in these stories hold the control.

Today, the eroticization of gendered sexual violence continues in all forms of media. Even restricting ourselves to literature, two of the most popular series of books in recent years (the *Twilight* and *Millennium* series) depend on the threat of sadistic rape as key plot points. How can we challenge these scripts? For Marcus, such scripts can be challenged from within: “One crucial contradiction of the rape script is that it casts women as weak victims yet posits massive amounts of force and violence as necessary to rape us. We can thus draw from the rape script itself the implication that we may possess more force than the script leads us to think we do”

(402-03). In the texts studied in this dissertation, all of the rapes were brutal and violent, but the victims were young girls. Marcus suggests that we turn these scenes on their heads and evaluate the power these young girls possess, that the male murderers would use such excess violence to silence them. Furthermore, Marcus encourages us to develop “a politics of fantasy and representation” (400). Such a new form of representation will serve to check the pervasive amount of gendered violence: “New cultural productions and reinscriptions of our bodies and our geographies can help us begin to revise the grammar of violence and to represent ourselves in militant new ways” (400). Marcus expresses it best when she says that she wants to “construct a society in which we would know no fear, we may first have to frighten rape culture to death” (400-01). I believe that the last part of this statement, the idea of frightening rape culture to death, is an interesting point of departure for further research.

Another avenue of scholarship is to look at texts, in which female characters escape the “narrative herding” of other writers, such as Zola, who confine women to specific spaces, using narrative intimidation in the form of lurking serial killers and other urban dangers that serve as “cautionary tales” (to use Walkowitz’s phrase) for women. These counter examples could include other imaginings of women “in circulation,” whether real or imagined travelers (Flora Tristan, Indiana), writers, and female criminals. Sand and authors such as Willa Cather show female characters who believe in their own potential and who find emancipation through travel. Friedman cites travel and movement as a “highly gendered phenomenon” (113). Literature is one example of cultural production that reproduces gendered spatial relations or alternately tests the boundaries of those social relations. Moreover, these characters address spatial anxieties and openly contest them within the narrative, which shows an awareness of norms and serves to deconstruct a fixed notion of spatio-temporal behavior. By looking at women’s writing (Sand) and other national literatures (Cather), we can find contesting views of normative spatial accounts. Judith Fryer acknowledges the power of imagining one’s way out of prescribed spaces



in her appraisal of Cather's novels: "To project an imaginative structure, [...] and at the same time to acknowledge it as an imaginative structure is to proceed 'as if'" (Fryer 342). Likewise, I maintain that narratives can also act as "space invaders," by contesting views of space and time that are static and gendered. Looking at other national literatures could be very helpful in finding more "counter narratives" that do not limit women's spatio-temporal freedom.

Further research in the area of the representation of sexual violence across national literatures could broaden our collective understanding of my research topic. I touched on examples from Italy, England, and Germany in my introduction. Other national literatures could be mined as well, and in fact, one of the best counter examples is from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, in which Raskolnikov continually "re-reads" gendered situations to rescue female victims (though his murder of two women complicates this).<sup>246</sup> Narratives that challenge the reification of female identity complicate the ubiquity of violence against women and help to challenge confining scripts and stereotypes that continue to be perpetuated.

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<sup>246</sup> Published in France in 1884, *Crime and Punishment*, heavily influenced by Hugo's *Les Misérables*, in turn was much discussed in France. *Crime and Punishment* appears in Russia before 1870, but is published in France in 1884 (see Chamberlain 381).

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#### Education

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#### Publications

“Fabrication, déchiffrement, et chiasme: l’autobiographie dans *W ou le souvenir d’enfance* et *53 jours* de Georges Perec.” *Romance Studies* 29.1 (January 2011): 19-26.

“Forcer son sort: Le travestissement dans *La Belle Alphrède*.” *Art et Usages du Costume de Scène*. Ed. Anne Verdier, Olivier Goetz, and Didier Doumergue. Lagny-sur-Marne: Lampsaque, 2007.

#### Conference Presentations

‘Gender and Space in Zazie’s Paris.’ Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium, Toronto, Canada. March 2010

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