



The Birth of the Beast: Death-Driven Masculinity in Monneret, Zola and Freud¹

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« [L]es bêtes sauvages restent des bêtes sauvages, et on aura beau inventer des mécaniques meilleures encore, il y aura quand même des bêtes sauvages dessous. » (Zola [1890] 1967, 53)

The beast in question in the title of this article is a very specific beast. It is the fantasy of embodied destruction to which the nineteenth-century imaginary gave birth. It is a beast gendered masculine—but ambivalently so—and constructed along strict ideological lines as the underside of progressive modernity and the product of sexual excess. Three types of discourse on destructive masculinity will be explored here, as the sub-heading suggests. ‘Monneret’ is the name of the author of a comprehensive medical work of 1861, the *Traité de pathologie générale*, in which the destructive monomanias are grouped together for the first time. My paper is not a contribution to Monneret studies; rather his name has a primarily symbolic function. ‘Monneret’ stands in for the discursive field comprised of nineteenth-century medicine, alienism and sexual science, which my investigation will tap.

‘Zola’ represents here a dual author function. Firstly his name is a synecdoche for Naturalism, the literary school which, in the words of Daniel Pick, dreamed both of ‘mastering disorder’ and of providing a ‘master narrative of disorder’ (Pick, 74), by trying to make literary craft approximate scientific method. Secondly, and more specifically, Zola’s novel *La Bête humaine* (1890) will be considered in detail as a work which functions as a historical and imaginative bridge between two models of destructive beastliness. On the one hand it draws for inspiration on the aberrant pathological masculine typology

described in alienist discourse by Monneret; in sexology by Richard von Krafft-Ebing; and in criminological accounts by Cesare Lombroso. It adheres rigidly to a model of predetermination and the belief in inherited moral, criminal and sexual traits. On the other hand, it prefigures in a number of suggestive ways the theory of destructivity expounded by my third set of texts, denoted by the author function, 'Freud'. These texts deal with the psychoanalytic model of the instincts that opposed life drive or Eros to death drive or Thanatos in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Freudian turn marked a de-personalization of the drive towards death. In Freud's model it was no longer perceived as a perverted outcome of sexual instinct; but as the primary condition of instinctual life.

By using very deliberately the term 'author function' borrowed from Foucault's 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?' (1969), I wish to emphasize that these figures and texts are being read as symbolic co-ordinates, plotted in the cultural discursive field. I also wish to privilege a reading of the texts as both reflective and productive of possibly unintended meanings and consequences for modern understandings of destruction, sexuality and gender; to which a focus on authorial *aim*—on 'the man and his works'—would not do justice. The approach adopted in this article, then, is a resolutely 'cultural studies' one which reads literary and medical texts together as indices of the preoccupations and world-view of their containing cultural imaginary. There will not be space here to do justice to a consideration of the legal and criminal discourses pertaining to the phenomena under discussion. Instead, the forms of destructive masculinity in question will be considered largely as philosophical discourses. In arguing in the first two sections that the lust murderer was produced as a deviant category of sexual subject as a result of a precise network of cultural forces and factors in the nineteenth century, I will be taking a broadly Foucauldian line. In the third part, I will engage critically with psychoanalysis in a similarly historically relativizing way.

MEDICAL MODELS

Of all the moral virtues, reason, as the marker of civilization, was accorded the privileged place in philosophical discourses of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ideology of driving out unreason is at least partly responsible for the birth of the institution of psychiatry in nineteenth-century France. Foucault has argued in *Folie et déraison* (1961) that in the pre-modern era, madness was assigned a functional role. The motif of the 'ship of fools' symbolized the expulsion of unreason (as a *different form* of reason) from

mainstream society, but not its excision. In modernity, by contrast, Pinel's psychiatric reforms and the rise of the asylum marked the attempt to colonise alterity, tampering with consciousness and breaking the dialogue between reason and insanity. The term 'alienism', used to describe the profession in its early days, reveals much about its ideology: an 'alienated' person was one who had 'lost possession' of himself, who was dislocated from the codes of reason that shaped sanctioned subjectivity. In the attempt to wrest authority from superstitious discourses of religion, which had conceived madness as possession by a demon, alienism sought to return afflicted subjects from a state of delirium to full possession of their senses.

One form of madness thought to rob subjects of self-possession was the operation of a single obsessive idea that exercised a grip over the functioning of reason. In 1810, Esquirol produced the diagnostic category of monomania to describe this invasion of reason by a dominant irrational impulse, belief or idea. The erotic monomanias—which will concern us here—said much about the expectations of the culture with regard to gender. Female monomanias were defined in terms of exaggerated or inappropriate manifestations of femininity. Monneret describes nymphomania as follows: 'Les femmes qui en sont atteintes se livrent à des gestes licencieux, à des manoeuvres lubriques et profèrent des paroles obscènes qui annoncent la violente excitation, en même temps que la perversion des instincts génésiques' (Monneret, 54). Male monomanias were similarly inappropriate expressions of masculinity (the compulsive masturbator) or, in the case which concerns us here, an exaggeration of masculine agency and aggression. 'La Monomanie homicide' is defined as a type of 'délire partiel', a symptom of epilepsy, leading to 'la perversion de l'instinct de conservation' (53). It is 'un instinct aveugle, quelque chose d'indéfinissable qui pousse le fou à tuer quelqu'un' (53-54). These insatiable and irresistible impulses are not accompanied by any 'désordre de l'intelligence ni des sentiments affectifs' (53). The mania to kill and derive pleasure from killing is identified as the 'perversion' of a universal instinct (*l'instinct génésique* or *l'instinct de conservation*). Its ability to take over the will of the otherwise rational subject was a cause of particular concern, as it suggested that reason and will could, under certain conditions, be subordinate to an animalistic instinct untouched by the moral faculties.

The erotic monomanias, then, were early labels to describe how desire threatened to disrupt self-possession (and consequently, the social order). The description of nymphomania highlights the fear of gender insubordination if women behaved lasciviously or according to unsanctioned desires rather than socially prescribed ones. Similarly, homicidal monomania threatened the

dissolution of ordered society if men, whose role it was to be moral safeguards of production and reproduction, gave way to destructive rather than procreative lusts.

The science of sexology that developed in the second half of the century, primarily in Germany, took over the guardianship of social institutions by attempting to identify, classify, understand and cure the kinds of sexual difference and dissidence that it perceived to be on the verge of threatening moral order. A common rhetorical strategy of alienism and sexology is to state the naturalness of the instinct towards life and reproduction. In the first chapter of his encyclopedic work of sexual classification, *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886), Austrian-born Richard von Krafft-Ebing makes the following claim: 'The propagation of the human species is not committed to accident or to the caprice of the individual, but made secure in a natural instinct, which, with all-conquering force and might, demands fulfillment' (Krafft-Ebing 1920, 1). The strength of conviction here may strike us as a case of protesting too much, given that Krafft-Ebing will go on to devote some 500 pages to cataloguing the many instances of determined resistance to this very instinct.

Perhaps in recognition of this, Krafft-Ebing then appeals to the necessity for moral restraint on the part of men, to prevent the natural instinct going awry. This is seen to happen surreptitiously and insidiously, via a mechanism of corruption, despite the appeal throughout the *Psychopathia Sexualis* to the contradictory logic of heredity and physiological predisposition. Men in particular are told to apply reason and moral sagacity in their sexual lives, as their 'natural predisposition' towards a higher sex drive than woman makes them particularly vulnerable. Krafft-Ebing tells us—in terms that abundantly confuse nature and class-bound culture—that 'if [a woman] is normally developed mentally and well bred, her sexual desire is small. If this were not so the whole world would become a brothel' (13). Whereas: 'from the fact that man by nature plays the aggressive role in sexual life, he is in danger of overstepping the limits which morality and law have set' (14). The logic of *Psychopathia Sexualis* is much the same as that of the *aliénistes*: emasculation creeps in as a result of the loss of self-control; sexual excess threatens to weaken men. But at the same time, they must retain just enough sexual aggressiveness to feel like 'real men'. Krafft-Ebing states that 'the role which the retention of sexual functions plays in the case of a man, both in originating and retaining his feeling of self-respect is remarkable. In the deterioration of manliness and self-confidence which the onanist, in his weakened nervous state, and the man that has become impotent, present, may be estimated the significance of this factor' (12). Concerns over semen conservation and the potential of

masturbation to lead to disease (as posited by Swiss physician Tissot as early as 1760) raise their head here. Sexual excess risks not only undermining the masculine imperative to build society and propagate the next generation, but also weakening the nervous and moral system of the individual and laying him open to worse consequences. In a system haunted by the logic of corruption and contagion, masturbation could lead to depleted moral faculties, which could lead to more 'serious' perversions such as sadism, necrophilia, and eventually, perhaps, to lust murder.

It is in discussing lust murder, in the section of the book dedicated to that perversion, that Krafft-Ebing deploys most freely a language of uncontrolled animal instinct and monstrosity. So, a certain Grassi who stabbed to death a female relative, is described as engaging in 'acts of bestiality' (83). And the subjects in this category are referred to *en masse* as 'psycho-sexual monsters' (86). It is perhaps not surprising that a repulsion for violence should lead the author to use such emotive terms to describe the behaviour in question. However, one cannot read this animal and teratological vocabulary as referring *only* to the specific and extreme acts it purports to be describing. The language of instinct leading to bestiality echoes Krafft-Ebing's words of warning regarding the citizen's socio-sexual duty to avoid 'the lustful impulse to satisfy' the instinct of 'sensuous love' (whether by adultery, masturbation or other non-violent acts; as well as by sadism and lust murder). For in doing this, he tells us, 'man stands on a level with the animal' (1).

Sexual science then, sets up the ideal of masculine agency, the 'naturalness' of male aggression in sex and the force of male sex drive. It warns against weakening good virile male aggression on the one hand by means of masturbation or effeminacy, and on the other it warns against the excessive pursuit of 'satisfaction of the sexual appetite' for this leads to an animalistic exacerbation of the instinct, as seen in sadism and lust murder. It demonstrates a belief both in heredity (in the inherited pre-disposition towards mental and physiological dysfunctions), and in the corrupting power of sex. This is demonstrated by the fact that Krafft-Ebing rendered the most obscene details of his case studies in Latin, so that the uninitiated could not be corrupted into imitative behaviour if their eyes fell upon an open copy of his book. Effectively, then, the ideal of masculine behaviour presented leaves little room for manoeuvre for those aspiring to it; the nineteenth-century male is trapped in a series of logical tautologies and double-binds. The discourse of sexual science has high expectations of masculinity as the fantasized embodiment of reason, but also a fatal suspicion of male weakness. It only barely manages to disguise this latter by means of its misogynistic projection of passivity onto women, seen

in Krafft-Ebing's comment on the high number of male sadists and lust killers as compared to female ones. The male 'sadistic force is developed', he suggests, 'by the natural shyness and modesty of women' (148).

To understand the beliefs and ideologies shaping sexology, one must turn to an examination of the philosophical discourses of degeneration theory that proliferated towards the *fin de siècle*, popularized by Buchez, Morel and Moreau in France; by Cesare Lombroso's criminal science in Italy, and by Max Nordau in Germany. While, as Daniel Pick has pointed out in his study of this 'European disorder', degeneration took varying forms in the distinct national cultures, it nonetheless shared common concerns, precepts and obsessions (106). Degeneration theorists pursued the logic that non-reproductive sexuality contributed to the moral, physiological and mental deterioration they perceived to afflict the European population at the turn of the century. About sexual excess, i.e. perversion, Nordau wrote in 1892 (in terms redolent of the obsession with semen conservation) that it renders the whole society, as well as the individuals in it, 'too worn out and flaccid to perform great tasks' (1993, 557). This worn-out and flaccid population risked regressing from their position of evolved reason to an atavistic condition: 'It is a descent from the height of human perfection to the low level of the mollusc' (141-42). Rather than civilized man, the modern population risked becoming 'anti-social vermin' (557). The regressive beast of degeneration, then, is described by Nordau in the same terms as the monomania of homicide in Monneret or the unreasoned sexual excess in Krafft-Ebing that devitalizes the population and turns its mind to destruction rather than procreation: from will and reason to animal instinct. Sexual perversions, writes Nordau, 'run directly contrary to the purpose of the instinct, i.e. the preservation of the species' (Nordau 260).

The figure of the lust murderer described by nineteenth-century scientists actualizes in the public sphere the destructive and disruptive potential of sexuality that the onanist only risks in the confines of his bedchamber. This figure haunted the scientific and literary discourses of degeneration in the form of Lombroso's inherent criminal and Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll; the underside of rational man. He became the poster child of medical and social discourses—for it would have been hard to convince the reader that fetishism or erotomania so directly threatened the survival of civilization. Instead this hybrid figure, uniting hyper-masculinity and everted masculinity, became an appropriate spectre of beastly horror for the culture that gave birth to him.

ZOLA'S BEAST

It is widely acknowledged that *La Bête humaine* constitutes an attempt to craft, in literary form, a case history of the sexual criminal subject in conformity with the scientific theorization of the day. Work by Geoff Woollen, Daniel Pick (84-85), and Pauline McLynn has demonstrated various filiations between Zola's text and the ideas of Bernard, Lombroso, Morel and Nordau. The response of the scientists in question to Zola's project differed considerably. Delighted to have a novelist popularizing his theories, Lombroso wrote approvingly of the physiognomical characterization of Zola's *dramatis personae*. Noting that Zola's anti-hero is described as a 'beau garçon au visage rond et régulier, mais que gâtaient des mâchoires trop fortes' (Zola, 1967, 48), he remarked that 'le Jacques Lantier a bien quelques caractéristiques anatomiques du criminel né' (Lombroso, 261). (Although he also argued that Zola's portrayal was not psychologically accurate as the 'real' murderer with a hereditary predisposition towards lust killing would never be able to enjoy sexual intercourse with a woman without feeling the need to kill her, as Jacques is shown doing in his early encounters with Séverine.) For Nordau, on the other hand, Naturalist literature was a cause of degeneration, not a means of enlightening the population about it; and Zola's novels were among those that he condemned most forcefully. Nordau strongly believed that degenerate art, such as he termed Naturalism, was rooted in the 'sexual psychopathology' of its creator. In the context of a system in which artists and writers were seen to bear strong resemblances to the mentally ill, Nordau was able to write of novelists that 'all persons of unbalanced minds [...] have the keenest scent for perversions of a sexual kind' (Nordau, 451).

As well as borrowing theories from scientific contemporaries, Zola drew, like them, on the popular press for case material. Sketches for a novel about a man with an overwhelming desire to kill women 'un homme qui a besoin de tuer' (see McLynn, 126), first occur in Zola's notebooks as early as 1874. However, Jacques Lantier probably owes both his name and certain characteristics to the sensationalist press coverage of the murders of Jack the Ripper (*Jacques l'éventreur*) in London, which fascinated readers across Europe in 1888. Krafft-Ebing used the case of the Whitechapel murderer as exemplary illustrative material for his theorization of the diagnostic category of lust murder. Wishing to prove that in this type of perversion, the instinct to reproduce has wholly been replaced with a desire to destroy, he writes: 'He does not seem to have had sexual intercourse with his victims, but [...] the murderous act and subsequent mutilation of the corpse were equivalents for the sexual act' (Krafft-Ebing 1997, 32). And true to form, Zola's text parallels this. When the reader is first made

aware of Jacques's unorthodox desire, it is in the following terms: 'Tuer une femme, tuer une femme! Cela sonnait à ses oreilles, du fond de sa jeunesse, avec la fièvre grandissante, affolante du désir. Comme les autres, sous l'éveil de la puberté, rêvent d'en posséder une, lui s'était enragé à l'idée d'en tuer une' (61). Jacques's murderous desire first occurs at puberty, then, suggesting an unhealthy parallel to 'normal' development; the supplanting of sex with death-lust. This passage reads like the contextualizing case notes found in the studies of individual patients in sexological manuals.

Geoff Woollen (1995) and Philippe Hamon (1994) have pointed out the probable influence on Zola of a short story by the Belgian *petit naturaliste* Camille Lemonnier, 'L'Homme qui tuait les femmes', which appeared in *Gil Blas* on 2 November 1888, and which was also inspired by the Whitechapel killings. Lemonnier's treatment of the subject matter is, however, very different from Zola's. The first-person narrative is voiced by the murderer, who comments at one point: 'Je lègue à la science [...] l'être pervers et compliqué qui pour moi demeura un insondable problème'. (cited in Hamon 1994,135). Lemonnier's hero expresses a dissociation from the unknowable part of himself that feels the need to kill, while Jacques Lantier asks endless questions about the cause of his condition, expressed via *style indirect libre*. Musing on the origins of his sexual inclination, Jacques wonders: 'cela venait-il donc de si loin, du mal que les femmes avaient fait à sa race, de la rancune amassée de male en male depuis la première tromperie [...]?' (62). Where Lemonnier's text is keen to leave intact the mystery of homicidal desire, and issues (what we may read as) a challenge to science to explain it, Zola's text attempts to take further scientific understanding of the phenomenon of inherited criminality, by inserting partial answers consistent with the ideologies of heredity and degeneration into the formulations of Jacques's self-interrogation.

The significance of *La Bête humaine* for my purposes, however, may reside somewhere other than in its neat approximation of scientific method. The text seems to propose at moments that the representation of Jacques's desire to kill women may not (only) be the result of the perversion of the instinct of conservation, or the fatal trait inherited from a degenerate family line, but rather a logical consequence of the ways in which culture dreams the asymmetrical distinction between the sexes. Yet, this is never explicitly given, and Jacques's status in the text is tantalizingly ambiguous, swinging between the two perspectives: does he constitute an example of the taxonomical logic or a potential critique of it?

If sometimes it is made abundantly clear that Lantier is intended to do no more than fulfill the criteria for a case study of the lust murderer, at other points

in the novel, Jacques's quirk is used to suggest a paradigm of a more general theory of masculine desire as inevitably tainted with thanatic ambition: 'posséder, tuer, cela s'équivalait-il dans le fond sombre de la bête humaine?' (153). And, towards the climax of the novel, when Jacques is about to kill Severine, an explicit link is made between the profundity of his desire for her and the crime of murder. To have her totally, he must kill her: 'La porte d'épouvante s'ouvrait sur ce gouffre noir du sexe, l'amour jusque dans la mort, détruire pour posséder davantage'. (269). A continuum is posited along which sex and murder both lie, as in Krafft-Ebing's diagnostic taxonomy. However, by this point it is ambiguous whether we are to read this as being the case just for that category of person constructed as the lust murderer, or whether it is being suggested that it is a more pervasive fantasy of male heterosexuality.

In their comprehensive feminist sociological history of lust murder, *The Lust to Kill*, Cameron and Frazer have shown that the language used to describe lust murder in both scientific and popular accounts tends to stress the atavistic, primitive, bestial quality of its perpetrator. They point out that such rhetoric alludes to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century idea of a 'state of nature' (Cameron and Frazer, 66). This term describes the belief that it is possible to analyse how human beings might have been, had they not attained civilization, but remained in a primitive state. They have argued that the lust murderer, far from being constructed as radically other to the 'normal' male is in fact posited as merely an earlier, more 'natural' version of him; his homicidal excesses providing an extension of phallic masculine aggressivity. Depending on which of two common cultural discourses is operating (the murderer as low beast or the murderer as transgressive rebel) this fantasy of the primitive acquires either degenerate or heroic qualities.

With reference to Jacques Lantier, Vernon Rosario has argued that it is in fact the trace of the feminine that is feared and despised in the figure of the beast in man: 'la bête humaine crouching in the dark recesses of the individual and collective psyche was the primitive, pathological, deadly erotic imagination, and its sex was female' (Rosario, 163). As we have seen, weakness and a proximity to nature and the instinctual were codified as feminine in nineteenth-century philosophy and sexual science, whilst the mastery of reason connoted masculinity. However, as the following extract from *Psychopathia sexualis* reveals, the supposed greater capacity of the male for sexual lust rendered him in danger of 'feminine' weakness precisely at the moment that he was apparently most masculine: 'undoubtedly man has a much more intense sexual appetite than woman. [...] In accordance with the nature of this powerful impulse, he is aggressive and violent in his wooing(12)'. Yet, '[t]he

weakness of men in comparison with women lies in the great intensity of their sexual desires'. The more desirous he is, 'the weaker and more sensual he becomes' (14). Here Krafft-Ebing is describing the condition of the so-called normal, healthy male. Jacques's fantasy of destructive revenge on the female who provoked his weakness is thus understandable as an exaggeration of a 'normal' masculine attitude. Ironically, then, Zola's lust murderer Jacques Lantier, and the sexologist Krafft-Ebing, employ the same logic in relation to the female: the 'weakness' that desire suggests for the male, is projected onto the object of his lust, from whom the weakness is erroneously perceived to emit. The fantasy of sexual and moral weakness with which femininity was associated, and the fantasy of a monstrous, exaggerated destructive masculinity, both come to rest on the same site: the figure of the 'lust murderer'. The prevalent scientific imagination, obsessed with the thanatic quality of masculine eros that it observed in its ever-expanding clinics and in the headlines of the gutter press, scapegoated its own creation, rather than questioning the logical consequences of its rigid binary gender system.

It is via an examination of narrative point of view in *La Bête humaine* that we can see how our understanding of Jacques's perspective is allowed to slip from one of aberration to universality. The terms in which the murder of Séverine is framed are particularly revealing in this respect: 'Elle renversa son visage soumis, d'une tendresse suppliante, découvrait son cou nu, à l'attache voluptueuse de la gorge. Et lui, voyant cette chair blanche, comme dans un éclat d'incendie, leva le poing armé du couteau' (269). The strategy is one of dramatic irony. The reader, possessed of the knowledge of the secret of Jacques's desire, can anticipate the radical misreading of Séverine's signals that will occur. Intending to tempt her lover to have sex with her, Séverine fatally mismanages the other's desire and hastens her own murder.

It is because the reader's attention is aligned throughout much of the narrative with Jacques's point of view—and crucially never with Séverine's—that the dramatic irony of this episode can function. We know that Jacques's desire is to 'la jeter sur son dos, morte, ainsi qu'une proie qu'on arrache aux autres' (151). The passage cited shows how the woman's motivation is construed from the masculine viewpoint. Our unproblematized identification with Jacques suggests that if the character's status flickers in the text between personifying the pathologized figure of the sexological object of enquiry *and* the universal male subject of the culture, at this moment when he should so clearly be the former, the narrative voice forces us to relate to him as the latter.

The gender bias of the viewpoint of *La Bête humaine* is brought into even sharper relief if we compare the passage I have just quoted with an extract from

a minor female-authored Naturalist text, treating similar subject matter, which places the female perspective into the foreground. Rachel Mesch has brought recent critical attention to Lucie Delarue-Mardrus's *Marie, fille-mère* (1908), contending that this novel constitutes a spirited response to Zola's famous account of masculine beastliness (Mesch, 327). In one passage of *Marie, fille-mère*, we are given the following account of heterosexuality:

Elle ignorait que le désir est un chasseur sans pitié. Elle ne s'était jamais demandé pourquoi toutes les femelles animales, plus intelligentes que les filles, commencent par fuir les males après les avoir appelés à cause qu'une sorte de peur les talonne devant la fatalité de l'amour. [...] Elle ne savait pas qu'il y a de la lutte dans l'amour et de l'assassinat dans la possession, qu'il y a d'un côté l'attaque, et de l'autre la défense, et que l'homme, plus cruel que tout autre bête, est agité dans sa jeunesse par la sourde envie de terrasser la femme comme un adversaire plus faible. (Delarue-Mardrus, 20)

Here, the language of murderous attack is used to describe romantic love. Drawing on the lexicon of the animal world, man as beast, and woman as prey Delarue-Mardrus both cites and inverts Zola's formula. Using the figure of the lust murderer, Zola literalizes and puts at the surface the destructive misogyny and the paranoia regarding male sexual incontinence that run through nineteenth-century scientific accounts of heterosexual desire. The female novelist on the other hand dresses the socially prescribed act of sexual intercourse as a *metaphorical* murder. The difference is that our close collusion with Jacques's point of view at its most extreme naturalizes misogyny and makes sex murder appear inevitable, while our proximity to Marie's perspective here, invites us to question, in the very terms of the scientific discourse itself, the inevitability of masculine destructivity and, crucially, the necessity of female collusion with it. This restores subjectivity to what in Zola's account is only a victim-position.

Yet the figure of desire-as-destructivity that is at the centre of Zola's conception paradoxically allows him, via the characterization of Flore, to separate masculinity (which is aligned with destructivity) from biological maleness. As Hannah Thompson rightly points out, Philippe Hamon's division of Zola's *dramatis personae* into 'personnages féminins' or 'personnages masculins' (Hamon 1983) is too simplistic (Thompson, 97). It conforms with the elision of the distinction between sexed bodies and cultural codes of gender that the French language presupposes. That is, it collapses masculinity unproblematically onto maleness; and femininity onto femaleness; as if they are naturally linked rather than culturally coupled. This supposition of a natural link was certainly the common belief of the time. However the treatment of desire and identity in *La Bête humaine* is not quite consistent with this supposition. The

character of Flore is presented to us in terms that are strikingly similar to the presentation of Jacques. Like him, she is troubled by a blood lust: 'elle avait la curiosité des accidents' (68). Unlike Sévérine, defined as rape victim, abused wife and finally murder victim—that is, archly feminine and heterosexual—Flore is described as deliberately impenetrable: 'vierge et guerrière; dédaigneuse du mâle' (58). Whilst Sévérine is an unwilling and traumatized accomplice in the murder of Grandmorin, Flore's single-minded jealous passion gives birth to devastation, when her attempt to kill Jacques and Sévérine leads to the derailment of the train and mass death of its passengers. And, significantly, Zola has her die of her own volition, walking into the path of the oncoming train, like a warrior walking into battle: 'elle avait le besoin de marcher jusqu'au bout, de mourir toute droite, par un instinct de vierge et de guerrière' (250).

Binary difference determines the condition of desire in the logic of heterosexuality. In *La Bête humaine*, the binary difference in question is no longer simply the division and assumed complementarity between male and female, but that between destructive agency and passive victimhood. The fact that these are usually mapped directly onto masculinity and femininity and thence onto maleness and femaleness is undeniable but the text suspends at least the articulation of this adumbration. The logic of desire in *La Bête humaine*, in which active sexual desire equates with the desire for death results in an elaborate analogy of same- and hetero- desire where the desired quality in the other is not sex or gender but a position around destruction or victimhood: being doer or done-to. Flore, in desiring Jacques, who is an agent of death, suggests a model of desire analogous to homosexuality, but—crucially—from which the privileged term of sex is removed (she does not desire another woman, but another destructive agent like herself). Jacques, in preferring, ultimately, the tempting victimhood of Sévérine as complement to his murderous assertiveness, metaphorizes the heterosexual choice. This is not quite proto-queer, as it still retains a binary logic that runs parallel to heterosexuality. Writing of the nature of the homosexual in a letter to Dr Lauptz, Zola recapitulates Karl Ulrich's notion of homosexuality as the soul of one sex in the body of another; homosexuality understood according to heterosexual principles: 'l'homme efféminé, délicat, lâche; la femme masculine, violente, sans tendresse'. (Zola 1979, 234). Using destruction rather than gender/sex as the crucial identity category in the case of Flore and Jacques frees up gender attributes from biological sex, making a more complex picture of Zolian desire than Hamon allows for and making the human beast a matter of *masculine* rather than *male* desire and identity (that is, emphasizing its cultural rather than its naturally occurring status).

What Zola's novel does, by dint of its novelistic, and more specifically its

naturalist qualities (since naturalist novels sought to depict objectively the whole of human life in its minutiae) is to make the perspective of pathological marginalized masculinity into a universal of masculinity, while allowing the gesture towards universalism to be disrupted by numerous literary techniques that show it to be an echo of the gendered and conservative viewpoint of the scientists Zola apes. The value of the literary narrative is that it allows us to see where the subject and object of theorization touch. Zola's theory of homicidal masculinity echoes Monneret's language of the 'perversion de l'instinct de conservation' and delineates the mentally alienated individual. Yet it also echoes the anxious voice of the scientists musing on the potential weakness and destructivity of all masculinity, if moral restraint cannot hold them in check. That is, it crisscrosses continuously between the specific and the general; the apparently aberrant and the apparently universal; demonstrating how the one segues irresistibly into the other whenever discourses seek to reveal 'the truth' about the significance of human sexual behaviour.

FREUD AND 'CIVILIZED' THANATOS

If it can be established, then, that Zola's pseudo-sexological case study of lust murder both repeats some of the fundamental ideas of the scientists he admired, but at the same time, calls to our attention and thereby denaturalizes their guiding ideologies, it is also true that *La Bête humaine* pre-figures in numerous ways the model of the death drive proposed by Sigmund Freud in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of 1920.

If the sexological typology is mapped onto the character of Jacques in the novel, the metapsychological notion of death-drive, it has been suggested by Gilles Deleuze, finds its symbolization in the figure of the *fêlure* itself: 'Ce que la fêlure désigne, ou plutôt ce qu'elle est, ce vide, c'est la mort [...] l'instinct de la mort, qui n'est pas un instinct parmi les autres, mais la fêlure en personne, autour de laquelle tous les instincts fourmillent' (Deleuze, 15). In a further rhetorical step, Deleuze assimilates the *fêlure* with the whole system of inherited degeneration, in both its locally occurring manifestations (*soma*) and its genetic forms (*germen*): 'la grande hérédité sous la petite' (16) (see also Duffy, 220). The process of heredity itself, then, is the motor of the death drive in Deleuze's account.

Yet it is important to dissociate the ideology of Freud's model of the instincts from the idea of heredity as it appears in Nordau and Lombroso. Freud was careful, in the first of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1915), to uncouple perversion—even in its most extreme forms—from its link with inherited

degeneration. He writes: 'It is natural that medical men, who first studied perversions in outstanding examples and under special conditions, should have been inclined to regard them as indications of degeneration and disease. Nevertheless, it is even easier to dispose of that view in this case than in that of inversion' (Freud [1915] 1991, 74). Even the arch demystifier of psychoanalytic method, Foucault, commented that psychoanalysis, unlike sexology, 's'est opposée, rigoureusement, aux effets politiques et institutionnels du système perversion-hérédité-dégénérescence' (Foucault 1976, 158). Moreover, there is a crucial difference between the destructive tendency thematized (in differing but still ideologically comparable terms) by Monneret, Krafft-Ebing and Nordau on the one hand and the Freudian model of death drive on the other. For the former group of theorists, the desire for destruction is the perversion of a natural instinct, to which the few are pre-disposed by heredity or congenital weakness, while for Freud the death drive is not derivative of the life drive, but the most primary instinct. Freud states: 'the aim of all life is death' (Freud [1920]1991, 311) and 'instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death' (311). While these statements are highly speculative and controversial, they have a rhetorically strategic power. By inverting the nineteenth-century psychiatric mantra that the instinct for life and reproduction (*l'instinct de conservation/ l'instinct génésique*) are not only socially desirable but also 'natural', Freud, unlike the other thinkers discussed here, allows for a reflection on the means by which culture manipulates instincts into the service of certain sanctioned forms of reproduction and conservation.

A characteristic of Freudian death drive is its machinality. Freud describes the death drive as a *Zwang*; that is, as a powerful, blind, driving instinct. Unlike the instinct to kill, described by Monneret, Krafft-Ebing, Lombroso and Zola, however, the death drive does not find its inevitable expression in lustful murder or destruction—it is not Eros gone awry and embodied in the category of the deviant. To manifest as masochism or sadism, it must first—crucially—fuse with life drive, the binding principal of sociality. Rather, the death instinct is described as operating within a hydraulic system in which it attempts to unbind the energy that Eros seeks to bind together. The proto-typical idea of the Freudian death drive is made manifest in *La Bête humaine*, I would argue, not at the level of *fêlure*, as Deleuze would have it, but in the figure of the *machine*. Writing on machinality in *La Bête humaine*, Geoff Woollen has stated that in the novel: 'tout absolument est réduit au niveau de la machine' (Woollen 1983, 117). He goes so far as to carry out a very useful statistical analysis of the occurrences of the word 'machine'—some 138—in comparison with the word 'locomotive'—a modest 2—to refer to the engine *la Lison* (118). The reason he proposes for this—

with which I am totally in agreement—is the greater metaphorical and associative potential of the former in comparison to the latter. Woollen goes on to point out the machine-like qualities attributed to the epileptic episodes of the born-criminal, and by extension, the links between the engine and Jacques's *fêlure*. However, for me, the machinality of the train, which represents modernity with its paradoxical associations of progress and the blind drive for destruction, moves us from the taxonomical diagnosis towards metapsychological concerns.

In the seminar of 12 January 1955, 'Freud, Hegel, et la machine', Lacan seeks to get to grips with the specificity of Freud's death drive as a quintessentially modern invention/revelation. He does this via a discussion of the machine. Lacan reminds us that Hegel had dubbed himself 'l'incarnation de l'Esprit dans son temps' (Lacan 1978, 94) and Napoleon its powerful, carnal soul. However, he states that both of them 'se sont distingués par le fait qu'ils ont complètement méconnu l'importance de ce phénomène qui commençait à poindre de leur temps—la machine à vapeur' (94-95). Lacan goes on to elaborate: 'Entre Hegel et Freud, il y a l'avènement d'un monde de la machine. L'énergie [...] est une notion qui ne peut apparaître qu'à partir du moment où il y a des machines' (95). So, between the theory of instincts of early psychiatry (which should be in the pursuit of procreation, but that get fatally perverted by the inherent sickness of desire) and the Freudian model of the life drive and death drive as competing energetic forces in perpetual tension within a system (whether the body or the body politic), we have the steam train... and Zola.

One does not need a perspective inflected with degeneration theory, then, to read the steam train, that highest achievement of civilization, as an appropriate metaphor for the motor of modern destruction. Recognizing the co-existence of civilization and destruction in the same locus does not necessarily suggest the logic of Nordau; it may also reveal the disavowed content of discourse. By this I mean to draw attention to the fact that it was in the name of civilization that Nordau's and Lombroso's theories of degeneracy justified referring to inherently superior and inferior racial types and to confining women to the domestic sphere, since female emancipation was felt to threaten and contravene the 'natural' order which civilization must ape. It was also in the name of civilization that Nazi eugenics harnessed this very discourse. That altericides are regularly committed *in the name of civilization* is something that Nordau refuses and that Freud is able to demonstrate only too clearly using his theory of death drive. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), he writes:

it is very far from my intention to express an opinion upon the value of human civilization. I have endeavored to guard myself against the enthusiastic prejudice which holds that our civilization is the most precious thing we possess or could

acquire and that its path will necessarily lead to heights of unimagined perfection. (Freud [1930] 1991, 339)

Death drive in civilization is perceived as the common condition of each individual, caught in a dilemma between selfish satisfaction-seeking and the demands of communality; not as the pathology of a few. Unlike degeneration theory, then, Freud's death drive can be used in the service of a critical analysis of the constitution and aims of civilization itself; not as a weapon against alterity on behalf of a principle of civilization.

CONCLUSION

In the first section of this article, it was noted that sexological typologies tend to exaggerate the characteristics of 'ordinary' masculinity and femininity as they are perceived in the ideology of the containing culture. Thus, the creation of the categories of, for example, nymphomania or masochism in the female and sadism and lust murder in the male, reveal more about the gender ideologies of the culture which produces them than about the so-called conditions themselves. Equally, however, what is less often commented upon is that the taxonomies of perversion contribute in turn to our cultural understandings of 'ordinary' masculinity and femininity and serve to reinforce culture's strongest prejudices and fears.

In this article I hope to have shown how destructivity is related to sexual instinct and to gender in the scientific discourses of the mid-late nineteenth century. A sexual taste for destruction is linked to the reproductive instinct gone awry and is attributed to the pathological figure of the homicidal monomaniac (in the terms of French alienism) or the lust murderer (in the terms of German sexology). The creation and elaboration of this category of sexual subject allows sexual science to sidestep any reflection on its tendencies towards a profound misogyny (fear of female sexuality) and its distrust of the disruptive force of non-conformist types of love. Scapegoating instead this extreme pathological figure as the disastrous outcome of a failure or rejection of domestic heterosexuality, it retains its moral high ground as the guardian of the species. The inequities and bigotries of hetero-patriarchal discourse left a stain which was erased, or at least covered over, by the threat embodied in the shadow of the emergent figure of the human beast, personified by Zola's Lantier.

Freudian death-drive theory is deliberately less interested in minority typologies of the death-driven subject than in positing a universal tendency towards destruction, which is not explicitly gendered, though its manifestations (war, social unrest, sexual aggression) are socially codified as masculine. By

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uncoupling sexual perversion from degeneration, and death-drive from sexual perversion, Freud highlights what the alienists and sexologists strove to occlude: the fact that single-minded, machine-like destructivity is the characteristic not of the aberrant, regressive beast but of the 'civilized' society itself, bent not only on progress and self-improvement but also on war, genocide and domination of weaker powers. Zola's text bridges the two models in the ways that I have shown, and it is perhaps significant in this regard that the final image with which the book leaves us is the out-of-control train, transporting the soldiers towards the Franco-Prussian war and defeat, 'sans conducteur, au milieu des ténèbres, en bête aveugle et sourde' (297). Jacques Lantier has literally and symbolically died, eclipsed by a larger force: one localized model of the destructive beast gives way to another—more pervasive—one; not the apparent enemy of civilization but the tensions inherent in civilization itself.

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NOTES

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