Part II
Romanticism and Nature; Naturalism and Animality

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Victor Hugo and the Politics of Ecopoetics

Abstract: This chapter argues that Victor Hugo's interactions with the natural landscapes of the Channel Islands throughout his exile in the 1850s form an ecopoetics in *Les Contemplations* (1856) that influences the theorising of an eco-conscious society in *Les Misérables* (1862). I trace an evolution from the poet's pre-exilic, fraught relationship with nature in a cycle of poems from 1846 to explicitly environmental poems from 1855 that inspire a pragmatic call for conservation in *Les Misérables*. By examining a highly charged chapter of the novel in which a damaged but healing landscape is featured, I propose that Hugo's tale represents a vast, but united, ecopoem in prose that envisions a rehabilitated human relationship to nature.

Although Hugo repeatedly insisted in his correspondence that *Les Contemplations* [*The Contemplations*] (1856) exemplified 'pure poetry',[1] certain poems resonate with a recent French essay that defines 'l'écopoétique [ecopoetics]' as the lyric incitation to act on a collective scale: 'cette esthétique concerne donc la pratique politique au sens où elle met en exercice non plus simplement l'idée d'un vivre ensemble, mais d'un faire ensemble, ou d'un faire par le vivre [this aesthetic thus concerns political practice in the sense that it enacts not merely the idea of living together, but of a doing together, or of a doing through living]'.[2] It is through a burgeoning love for what Michel Serres calls 'le lien qui unit la terre et la Terre [the bond that unites earth and Earth]',[3] the link between the local/land and the global/Earth, that Hugo's navigation and expression of the Channel Islands into poetic form incites environmental

1 Hugo made a slight, but unapologetic, caution to his publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel that even his intimate lyric poetry reflected his socialist convictions: '*Les Contemplations* sont poésie pure; tous mes précédents recueils, *Feuilles d'automne*, *Ch[ants] du crépuscule*, *Voix intérieures*, *Les Rayons et les ombres*, tout en étant aussi de la poésie pure, sont un reflet de mon esprit et ont par conséquent, tous, une certaine couleur socialiste [*The Contemplations* are pure poetry; all of my preceding volumes, *Leaves of Autumn*, *Songs of Twilight*, *Interior Voices*, *Rays and Shadows*, all being pure poetry as well, are a reflection of my soul and therefore all have a certain socialist colour]'. Victor M. Hugo and Pierre-Jules Hetzel, *Correspondance*, ed. by S. Gaudon, vol. 2 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 88 [unreferenced translations are mine].

2 Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28 (19).

3 Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 84.

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awareness, and becomes a means of revitalising modern society. Hugo's continual explorations of the Channel Islands inspired his ecologist's eye, and as such, *Les Contemplations* narrate the poet's growing understanding of nature as an ecosystem, and serve as an immediate conduit to a politics of the environment that surfaces within the utopian framework of *Les Misérables*.[4]

Hugo's natural habitat: Jersey

Hugo's arrival in Jersey in the aftermath of Napoléon III's coup provoked a profound change in how he examined natural phenomena, and transposed them into his poems. Shortly after landing on the island in 1852, he wrote with excitement to Belgian poet André Van Hasselt – 'je suis en pleine poésie, cher poëte, au milieu des rochers, des prairies, des roses, des nuées et de la mer [I am full of poetry, dear poet, in the middle of rocks, prairies, roses, clouds and the sea]' –, remarking how the new landscape allowed his dormant lyric[5] to gush forth: 'les vers sortent en quelque sorte d'eux-mêmes de toute cette splendide nature [the lines somehow emerge on their own from all of this splendid nature' (18 August 1852).[6] Nature on its own, freed from subservience to human interference, becomes enough for his lyric: 'au lieu de la tempête des idées, nous aurons la tempête du vent et de l'eau. Cela est grand aussi [instead of the storming of ideas, we will have a storming of wind and water. That is grand, too]' (to Adèle Hugo [his daughter], 25 July 1852).[7] Within a few months, Hugo went from casual musing about finding a house with a garden – 'pourquoi pas? [why not?]' (to Adèle Hugo [his wife], 19 April 1852) –[8] to enraptured immersion in the landscape of Jersey: 'c'est ma joie dans l'exil. Je me promène au bord de la mer. Je regarde les goëlands. Je lis quelques chers livres

4 The term 'ecology', which the German biologist Ernst Haeckel coined in 1866 to designate the scientific study of the relationship between the habitat of organisms and their larger environment, is anachronistic with regard to the timeframe under discussion (1846–62), yet Jean-Marc Drouin's history of ecology shows how this area of study was established in natural history discourses dating to antiquity. Jean-Marc Drouin, *L'Écologie et son histoire: réinventer la nature* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), chapter 2 ('Tableaux de la nature').

5 A thirteen-year gap separates *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1840) from *Les Châtiments* (1853).

6 Victor M. Hugo, *Correspondance*, ed. by P. Ollendorff and A. Michel, vol. 2 (Paris: Michel, 1950), 126–7.

7 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 119.

8 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 93. Hugo sent this letter shortly before departing from Brussels for Jersey.

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[…]. Je suis profondément calme [it is a joy to be in exile. I walk along the shore. I look at the seagulls. I read some treasured books […]. I am profoundly calm]' (to Alphonse Karr, 2 September 1852).[9] The newly arrived 'proscrit [exile]' considered the entire island to be his natural domain.[10]

For Jean-Bertrand Barrère, Hugo's immersion 'dans la nature au sens propre [in nature in the true sense of the word]' led to a 'rééducation réaliste de l'imagination [realist re-education of the imagination]', in which the landscape directly impacts his poetic imagination: 'disons que son fantaisisme se fait pastoral pour une large part, qu'il s'inspire de la nature [let's say that his fantasising becomes substantially pastoral, inspired by nature]'.[11] I would add that Hugo, as he settled into his habitat, did not exemplify a parasitic relationship to nature (by merely drawing inspiration from it), but established a symbiotic dialogue with his surroundings:

> L'équinoxe souffle énergiquement ici, mais c'est égal, nous vivons dans un calme profond, le ciel pleure, la mer gueule dans les rochers, le vent rugit comme une bête, les arbres se tordent sur les collines, la nature se met en fureur autour de moi, je la regarde dans le blanc des yeux et je lui dis: – De quel droit te plains-tu, nature, toi qui es chez toi, tandis que moi qui suis chassé de mon pays et de ma maison, je souris? – Voilà mes dialogues avec la bise et la pluie. (to Noël Parfait, 29 October 1853)[12]

> [The wind is blowing energetically here, but it doesn't matter, we live in a profound calm, the sky cries, the sea bellows in the rocks, the wind roars like a beast, the trees twist on the hills, nature works itself into a frenzy around me, I look at it in the eyes and I say to it: – What right do you have to complain, nature, you who are at home, while I, who am driven out of my country and out my house, smile? – Those are my conversations with the breeze and the rain.]

'Unité [Unity]' (I.XXV), a short poem from *Les Contemplations* that was written a few months before this letter, encapsulates the establishment of the poet's mutedly bold voice as he enacts a conversation between the 'infinite splendour' of the sun and the 'humble' daisy: '– Et moi, j'ai des rayons aussi! – lui disait-elle ["And I, too, have rays!", she said to the sun]' (10).[13] In tandem with the natural forces at work on Jersey, Hugo evokes a communicative lyric that bridges the divide between

9 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 129.

10 Hugo referred to Jersey as 'notre île jardin [our garden island]' in a letter to Hetzel (3 May 1855). Hugo and Hetzel, *Correspondance*, 127.

11 Jean-Bertrand Barrère, *La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 407.

12 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 173.

13 Victor M. Hugo, *Œuvres complètes*, 15 vols, ed. by J. Seebacher and G. Rosa (Paris: Laffont, 1985–90), V (1985), 290. For a chronology of *Les Contemplations*, which Hugo masked by adding false dates to the poems, see *OC*, V, 1075–8.

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local and universal, between the human self and the cosmos.[14] Graham Robb, quoting from Hugo's letter to Paul Meurice of 8 April 1856, suggests that the role of the human in Hugo's new world-view diminishes the poet into an inert object, and notes the impact of this reversal as one of the most indelible influences on the poet's language and form:

> This unpicking of the mind induced a state which sounds like the result of self-hypnosis: the sense of turning into an inanimate object while things and even concepts become sentient creatures. The English Channel should be counted as one of the main influences on Hugo's style: the characteristic phrase in which physical qualities are attributed to abstractions, and the grammatical oddity known as the 'métaphore maxima' – the direct juxtaposition of two nouns ('the Hydra Universe', 'the Sphinx Human Mind', 'the monstrous Sperm Ocean'), which dissolves the distinction between image and reality. 'Each stanza or page that I [Hugo] write always has something in it of the shadow of the cloud or the saliva of the sea'.[15]

Instead of retreating from nature's 'monstrous' forces, Hugo becomes a living part of his 'île jardin [garden island]' to the extent that he considers the ink-blots on the page to be sprays of sea-foam and droplets from clouds. Ludmila Charles-Wurtz remarks that 'il fait corps avec les "vents" et les "flots". La frontière entre le dedans et le dehors s'estompe' [he becomes one with the "winds" and the "waves". The distinction between inside and outside blurs],[16] positing that the saxifrage – a flower that roots itself in clefts of rock ('fleur du gouffre [chasm flower]') – is a metaphor for the exiled Hugo clinging to nature, and becoming enmeshed in the robust landscape.

The ecosystem of an archipelago: the Channel Islands

Hugo did not reside merely on an island, but on an archipelago, a geographical formation whose indeterminacy had infinitely stimulating, effects on body and imagination, as Frank Lestringant emphasises: 'l'errance dans l'archipel, où l'intérieur ne se distingue guère de l'extérieur, se prolonge-t-elle sans fin [the wandering in

14 Claude Gély examines how the flower, traditionally appropriated as an ornamentation in art, morphs into a luminous signature of Hugo's poetry in *Les Contemplations* through its rooting in the earth (mortality) and its reaching to the sky (the infinite). Claude Gély, 'Le Signe floral dans la poésie hugolienne des *Odes* aux *Contemplations*', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 38 (1986), 241–56.

15 Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (London: Picador, 1997), 330–1.

16 Ludmila Charles-Wurtz, 'La Poésie saxifrage', in *Victor Hugo 6: l'écriture poétique*, ed. by L. Charles-Wurtz (Caen: Minard, 2006), 95–122 (104). Saxifrage, also known as 'gale-of-the-wind', derives from the Latin for 'stone-breaker'.

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the archipelago, where interior can hardly be distinguished from exterior, continues without end]'.[17] Having no defined limits, the archipelago reflects the physical and psychological (non-)place of the poet, and his continually metamorphosing aesthetic: 'l'insulaire exalte la bigarrure; il est éloge de la variété [the insular exalts diversity; it is the praise of variety]'.[18] While Lestringant focuses on 'L'Archipel de la Manche [The Archipelago of the English Channel]', a preface destined for Hugo's novel *Les Travailleurs de la mer* [*The Toilers of the Sea*] (1866), the staggering variety of poems written for *Les Contemplations* suggest that Hugo's experience of the insulated, yet infinite, archipelago established an ecopoetics of hybridity and metamorphosis related to a dialectical dynamic of destruction and creation. The preface suggests the idea of a contained tumult:

> Ce sont, en effet, toutes les impressions, tous les souvenirs, toutes les réalités, tous les fantômes vagues, riants ou funèbres, que peut contenir une conscience, revenus et rappelés, rayon à rayon, soupir à soupir, et mêlés dans la même nuée sombre. (*OC*, V, 249)
>
> [They are, in effect, all of the impressions, all of the memories, all of the realities, all of the vague phantoms, cheerful or morbid, that a consciousness can contain, returned and brought to mind again, ray to ray, sigh to sigh, and blended together in the same sombre cloud.]

The linear, bookended narratives of Hugo's previous collections of poems disperse into a loose network of poems that maintain a fragile harmony.[19] The multitude of forms and continually shifting perspectives in *Les Contemplations* work together as a macrocosm of poetry that reflects the dynamics of the physical environment.[20]

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17 Frank Lestringant, '"L'Archipel de la Manche" ou l'insulaire de Hugo', *Studi francesi* 47.2 (2003), 267–74 (268).

18 Lestringant, '"L'Archipel"', 269.

19 Michel Serres observes that 'we have made politics or economics into their own disciplines so as to define power: how are we to think of *fragility*?'. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. by E. MacArthur and W. Paulson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 41.

20 Jean Gaudon notes how *Les Contemplations* make a crucial transformation from the poem to poetry: 'le poème envisagé comme un objet fini, destiné à prendre place dans un recueil constitué de façon factice, perd sa suprématie absolue. […] La poésie elle-même devienne océan, flux et reflux [the poem envisaged as a finished object, destined to be placed in a factitiously-put-together volume, loses its absolute supremacy. […] Poetry itself becomes the flux and reflux of the sea]'. Jean Gaudon, *Le Temps de la contemplation: l'œuvre poétique de Victor Hugo des 'Misères' au 'Seuil du gouffre' (1845–1856)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), 202–5.

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Les Contemplations are not romanticised nature poems that evoke solipsistic transcendence or facile harmony between subject and object.[21] Far from seamlessly merging into natural landscapes, Hugo flaunts the mediating processes of language and the imagination as he directly confronts the evocative (non-)landscape of his archipelago. The dark, apocalyptic metaphors of Hugo's visionary and unpublished poems of exile indicate that nature represents an intense and harrowing struggle, instead of a peaceful retreat. Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe suggests that Hugo's early use of metaphor shows him alternating between the traditional models of nature as nurturer (Christianity), and nature as passive, inert material (seventeenth-century mechanism), before evolving into more complex rhetorical ambiguity as he negotiates a secularised, Hegelian model of spiritual growth linked to a dialectic of progress and death in which 'nature's powers are harnessed': 'Hugo uses metaphors which portray progress simultaneously as a biological lifecycle and as a kind of secular transcendence, while using the vocabulary of war to indicate that progress is driven by conflict'.[22] At the cusp of the seismic appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), *Les Contemplations* demonstrate the vicious and destructive forces at work behind the scenes of procreation.[23] Hugo makes clear his definitive departure from 'rosy' nature: '*Les Contemplations* commencent rose et finissent noir. C'est le raccourci de ce spectre qu'on appelle la vie [*Les Contemplations* begin pink and finish black. It is the abridged version of this spectre that we call life]' (to Noël Parfait, 18 October 1855).[24] It is only through confronting the 'dark' underside of nature's workings that the poet can envision progress: 'la poésie saxifrage, fidèle à l'étymologie, croît dans les fissures de la

21 According to Lawrence Buell, 'the environment-poetic concept starts to become exclusionary when the ecopoem moves either a certain distance in the direction of self-conscious distancing of persona from world or a certain distance toward isolating objectification'. Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 53.

22 Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe, 'Humanity's Struggle with Nature in Victor Hugo's Poetry of Progress', *Modern Language Review* 107.1 (2012), 143–61 (144–5; 156). Lunn-Rockliffe refers to 'L'Ange [The Angel]', a section from *Dieu* [*God*] that Hugo drafted in 1855 as he was working in earnest on *Les Contemplations*.

23 Donald Worster demonstrates how another archipelago, the Galápagos Islands, prompted an 'ideological shift away from Thoreau's relation to nature to a more pessimistic view […] taken especially to heart by Darwin and Herman Melville'; he explains that 'a nature capable of making such landscapes was a force not to be altogether trusted anywhere'. David Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 114; 121.

24 Hugo and Hetzel, *Correspondance*, 181.

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roche jusqu'à faire éclater celle-ci, force destructrice qui préserve la possibilité même d'un renouveau dans un monde en voie de pétrification [saxifrage poetry, true to its etymology, grows in the fissures of the rock until the rock is sundered, a destructive force that preserves the possibility of renewal in a world on its way to petrifaction]'.[25] A humble and hidden flower represents a vital and indomitable force of regeneration and change.

'Les Contemplations': evolution

Two sets of poems from *Les Contemplations* highlight a decade-long evolution in Hugo's eco-understanding of nature: one dates from 1846 – before the self-imposed exile – with the poet's fraught awareness of nature emerging as he finally musters the courage to make a pilgrimage to his daughter Léopoldine's grave in Villequier;[26] the other is from 1855, after the exiled Hugo had completed the seminal 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre [What the Shadow's Mouth Says]' (VI.XXVI), in which his experiencing and contemplation of nature morphs into an articulation of social progress.[27] Hugo's sacrifice of the myth of human dominion over nature, as well as of the facile construct of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, gradually formed a utopian vision that yielded pragmatic conservation practices for a morally and physically polluted France.

After a hiatus of several years, Hugo returned to writing poems with a flourish in 1846, three years after Léopoldine's death. These poems, though they frequently feature a backdrop of idyllic and calm landscapes, are undercut with a melancholy that results from evoked memories and a looming presence of absence, regret and death. 'La Vie aux champs [Life in the Fields]' (I.VI), though it describes a peaceful countryside retreat, and seems to feature a poet at one with nature ('le poëte en tout lieu | Se sent chez lui, sentant qu'il est partout chez Dieu [the poet in every place | Feels at home, feeling that everywhere he is in God's home]' (3–4; *OC*, V, 261), recounts the poet's recognition of an unbridgeable gap between himself and the flocks of children who yearn to hear his stories: 'Je leur souris encor, bien

25 Charles-Wurtz, 'La Poésie saxifrage', 104.

26 Hugo's beloved daughter Léopoldine accidentally drowned at Villequier in 1843; *Les Contemplations*, forming a diptych of 'Autrefois [Formerly]' and 'Aujourd'hui [Today]', hinge upon this wrenching event.

27 Hugo noted the distinction between these two years when he supplemented 'Écrit en 1846', which was actually written in 1854, with 'Écrit en 1855 [Written in 1855]' (V.III); the brazen poet of the past becomes satisfied – 'Je suis content [I am happy]' (28; *OC*, V, 433) – with existing alone on 'un rocher [a rock]' (6; *OC*, V, 433).

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que je sois plus triste [I still smile at them, even though I am sadder now]' (26; *OC*, V, 261). The poem makes an abrupt shift in the last stanza from serene, naïve musings to a disturbing meditation, as the narrator describes what history has left in its wake; the children disappear, and the tranquil title of the poem becomes unsettling, even ironic, as the poet envisions ruins: 'Lieux effrayants! tout meurt; le bruit humain finit [Dreadful places! everything dies; human noise is finished]' (79; *OC*, V, 263). 'Églogue [Eclogue]' (II.XII), which at first appears to be an idyll in the manner of Theocritus – 'Que de fleurs aux buissons, que de baisers aux bouches, | Quand on est dans l'ombre des bois! [What flowers on the bushes, what kisses on the mouths | When one is in the shade of the woods!]' (5–6; *OC*, V, 309) –, leads to the threat of a monstrous abyss that serves as a metaphor for the shame and the jealousy spooking a pair of carefree lovers: '"J'ai peur qu'on ne nous voie!" ["I'm afraid that someone will see us!"]' (18; *OC*, V, 309).

The figure of the romanticising poet, who used to readily scrutinise and become one with nature, takes on a distinctly humbled role.[28] 'À Villequier [To Villequier]' (IV.XV) is the famous enactment of the crucial gesture of sacrifice by way of the tragic event of his daughter's death.[29] Hugo's shattering experience prompts him to temper the trademark voraciousness of his eye with the calm, but no less painful, admission that 'L'homme n'est qu'un atome en cette ombre infini [Man is but an atom in this infinite shadow]' (59; *OC*, V, 412). Through this acquiescence to humility, the landscape is not scrutinised, nor seized for its beauty or bounty, but left alone. Out of loss, the poet arrives at a profound moment of reckoning that markedly changes his treatment of nature:

> Maintenant qu'attendri par ces divins spectacles,
> Plaines, forêts, rochers, vallons, fleuve argenté,
> Voyant ma petitesse et voyant vos miracles,
> Je reprends ma raison devant l'immensité. (17–20; *OC*, V, 411)
>
> [Now that I am moved by these divine spectacles,
> Plains, forests, rocks, valleys, silvery river,

28 Barrère cites the influences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Nodier (all botanists) during Hugo's travels in the 1830s and 1840s, as the poet 'commence de se pencher sur la petite nature, pour y saisir cette vie microscopique qui l'agite [begins to lean towards little nature, in order to seize therein the microscopic life that moves it]' (*La Fantaisie* [*Fantasy*], 185–6); nature is 'seized', more than contemplated.

29 Hugo underscores sacrifice early in the preface: 'Traverser le tumulte, la douleur, le silence; se reposer dans le sacrifice, et, là, contempler Dieu [Pass through tumult, sadness, silence; rest in sacrifice, and, there, contemplate God]' (*OC*, V, 250).

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> Seeing my smallness and seeing your miracles,
> I regain my reason standing in front of the immensity.]

'Aujourd'hui [today]', he emphatically insists, 'Je me sens éclairé dans ma douleur amère | Par un meilleur regard jeté sur l'univers [I feel enlightened in my bitter sadness | By a better glance thrown at the universe]' (115–6; *OC*, V, 413). Adopting this 'regard [glance]' is a paradoxical move on the poet's part in favour of *not* looking – 'l'œil qui pleure trop finit par s'aveugler [the eye that cries too much ends up blinding itself]' (106; *OC*, V, 309) –, thereby assuming a conscientiously hands-off role that lightens the burden of human interference in nature:

> Je sais que le fruit tombe au vent qui le secoue,
> Que l'oiseau perd sa plume et la fleur son parfum;
> Que la création est une grande roue
> Qui ne peut se mouvoir sans écraser quelqu'un;
>
> Les mois, les jours, les flots des mers, les yeux qui pleurent,
> Passent sous le ciel bleu;
> Il faut que l'herbe pousse et que les enfants meurent;
> Je le sais, ô mon Dieu! (65–72; *OC*, V, 412)
>
> [I know that the fruit falls to the wind that shakes it,
> That the bird loses its feather and the flower its scent;
> That creation is a big wheel
> That cannot move without crushing someone;
>
> Months, days, waves of the seas, eyes that cry,
> Pass under the blue sky;
> The order of things dictates that grass should grow and that children should die;
> I know that, oh my God!]

Through sacrifice, Hugo comes to a fuller understanding of the less lofty role of humans within nature's network.

Later in exile, as Hugo's eyes were opened to the forces at work under the surface of nature, the impact of the (non-)landscape of an archipelago gradually inspired the author to lament the depravation of French society. 'La Nature [Nature]' (III.XXIX), one of the first poems drafted by Hugo when he entered an intensely productive phase of lyric output in 1854, can be read as a new branch of his evolving poetry that indicates how he has re-examined nature since his self-imposed 'blindness' in the Villequier cycle of poems from 1846. Hugo's new confrontations with nature on the Channel Islands not only sharpen his acute sense that nature has a voice (a well established motif), but also inspire his conviction

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that forces at work in nature are in conflict with those of society.[30] 'La Nature' – featured in the particularly agitated third book of *Les Contemplations*, 'Les Luttes et les Rêves [Struggles and Dreams]' – dramatically features the seemingly irreparable divide between civilisation and the natural world. A tree – happy to give humans its wood to be burned for warmth, to till the soil, to provide frames for houses, or to serve as masts for ships – is scandalised when asked to be used to construct gallows. Humanity's alienation from nature has led to such widespread moral barrenness that the tree is more reasonable and charitable than man: 'Allez-vous-en! laissez l'arbre dans les déserts [Go away! leave the tree in the deserts]' (43; *OC*, V, 368). Nature stands apart, more for humanity's benefit than its own.

The paradox of Hugo's great visionary poetry of exile, prominently featured in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', is its rooting in the poet's awareness of the role that nature must still somehow play in a century of progress. Everything that spills from the poet's 'bouche [mouth]' is emitted from his perch in Jersey: 'J'errais près du dolmen qui domine Rozel, | À l'endroit où le cap se prolonge en presqu'île [I was wandering near the dolmen that towers over Rozel, | At the place where the cape stretches into a peninsula]' (2–3; *OC*, V, 534). Written not long after 'La Nature', 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' suggests a newfound sense of energy, as the poet not only contemplates nature, but experiences it. Hugo draws on Romantic motifs – nature has a voice that the poet must interpret; man's fall from grace causes his alienation from nature –, but grounds any kind of abstraction or vision in an intense, reciprocal consciousness between all elements of the earth and the atmosphere: 'tout a conscience dans la création [everything in creation has consciousness]' (9; *OC*, V, 534). Though his newfound attentiveness to nature allows him to advance in poetry, the trade-off for this 'progress' is the realisation that not everything in nature is good – 'tout, même le mal, est la création [everything, even evil, is creation]' (9; *OC*, V, 536) –, and that humans – small in the vast scheme of things – will eventually be superseded by something else:

> Crois-tu que cette vie énorme, remplissant
> De souffles le feuillage et de lueurs la tête,
> […]
> S'arrête sur l'abîme à l'homme, escarpement?

30 In 1840, Hugo's growing engagement with politics, particularly with the socialist-inspired democratic utopia theorised by Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, led him to emphasise an ordered and fecund nature that informed his call in 'Fonction du poète [Function of the poet]' – the opening poem of *Les Rayons et les ombres* – for a harmonious society free of vice and competition: 'La création est sans haine [creation is without hate]'. (5; *OC*, IV (1985), 922).

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Non, elle continue, invincible, admirable,
Entre dans l'invisible et dans l'impondérable. (152–8; *OC*, V, 537)

[Do you think that this enormous life, filling
the leaves with breaths and the head with light,
[…]
Stops at the abyss with man, escarpment?
No, it continues, invincible, admirable,
It enters into the invisible and the imponderable.]

Humans are just an intermediary in the entangled web that exists between nature and a divine force. Confronting this recognition produces a dark vision of the cosmos – 'Ténèbres! l'univers est hagard [Shadows! the universe is haggard]' (668; *OC*, V, 549) – that pity floods with light: 'La pitié fait sortir des rayons de la pierre [Pity makes rays emanate from stone]' (638; *OC*, V, 548). From darkness emerges a topsy-turvy, yet functional and sustainable, environment: 'Le chat lèche l'oiseau, l'oiseau baise la mouche; | Le vautour dit dans l'ombre au passereau: Pardon! [The cat licks the bird, the bird kisses the fly | The vulture says in the dark to the passerine: "I'm sorry!"]' (690–1; *OC*, V, 550). The enduring power of this epic, environmentally aware poem derives from how the poet takes us to the extreme limit of human fragility and ignorance while safeguarding a resilient ecosystem.

'Melancholia' and the 'saxifrage' poet

'Thinking fragility' is a prominent motif in the poems of *Les Contemplations* from 1855, in which society is directly pitted against nature. On his 'garden' island, plucked or cut flowers frequently become the target of Hugo's chastisement of human greed, as in 'Je lisais. Que lisais-je? [I was reading. What was I reading?]' (III.VIII):

Les fleurs chastes, d'où sort une invisible flamme,
Sont les conseils que Dieu sème sur le chemin;
C'est l'âme qui doit les cueillir, et non la main. (54–6; *OC*, V, 343)

[Chaste flowers, from which shoots an invisible flame,
Are the signs that God sows on His path;
It is the soul that must harvest them, not the hand.]

Fashionable gardens, the bourgeois strolling-grounds of new public parks, and decorative flowers are the luxurious and gaudy confections of the affluent that evoke a phony Garden of Eden constructed with glass and trompe-l'œil in 'Melancholia' (III.II):

Ils ne regardent pas dans les ombres moroses.
Ils n'admettent que l'air tout parfumé de roses,

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La volupté, l'orgueil, l'ivresse, et le laquais,
Ce spectre galonné du pauvre, à leurs banquets.
Les fleurs couvrent les seins et débordent des vases. (295–9; *OC*, V, 336)

[They do not look in the morose shadows,
They only let in air all scented with roses,
Voluptuousness, pride, drunkenness, and the lackey,
This dressed-up spectre of a poor man, to their banquets.
Flowers cover breasts and spill from vases.]

The image of a ballroom dance appears once more in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', indicating Hugo's willingness to incorporate cultural trends into his universal ecosystem:[31]

Tout est douleur.
 Les fleurs souffrent sous le ciseau,
Et se ferment ainsi que des paupières closes;
Toutes les femmes sont teintes du sang des roses;
La vierge au bal, qui danse, ange aux fraîches couleurs,
Et qui porte en sa main une touffe de fleurs,
Respire en souriant un bouquet d'agonies. (616–21; *OC*, V, 548)

[All is sadness.
 Flowers suffer under scissors,
And shut themselves like closed eyelids;
All of the women are stained with the blood of roses;
The virgin at the ball, who dances, an angel of fresh colours,
And who carries in her hand a clutch of flowers,
Breathes in while smiling a bouquet of agonies.]

In 'Melancholia', Hugo produces a stream of tableaux – moving from prostitute to crook, to suffering poet, to animal abuser, to adulterers, to stone breakers, to parasitic rich bankers, to heedless ball attendees – that display the ghastly result of society's alienation from nature: 'Et le fond est horreur, et la surface est joie [What lies beneath is horrific, while the surface is joy]' (292; *OC*, V, 335). The poem displays an eerie, Hieronymus Bosch-esque apocalypse, in which nature is rendered unrecognizable:

Le bal, tout frissonnant de souffles et d'extases,
Rayonne, étourdissant ce qui s'évanouit;

31 Hugo's ecosystem thus anticipates current environmental theories that incorporate the city and culture in general as part and parcel of an eco-space: 'a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics, or politics – must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns'. Buell, *Environmental Criticism*, 22–3.

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Éden étrange fait de lumière et de nuit.
Les lustres au plafond laissent pendre leurs flammes
Et semblent la racine ardente et pleine d'âmes
De quelque arbre céleste épanoui plus haut. (300–5; *OC*, V, 336)

[The dance, all quivering with breaths and ecstasies,
Shines, stunning that which faints;
Strange Eden made of light and night.
The chandeliers on the ceiling let hang their flames
And seem to be the ardent root, full of souls,
Of some celestial tree blooming above.]

Urban distraction from nature and rampant materialism crystallise vegetation into a chandelier.

Like the stonebreaker, the 'saxifrage' poet is a 'Frère sombre et pensif des arbres frissonnants [Sombre and pensive brother of trembling trees]' (218; *OC*, V, 334). Hugo's panorama of social miseries shows that the poet entangles culture and the physical environment in order to find his way back into the woods. The last line is a cry of despair mixed with relief, since he can still recognise natural forms: 'Ô forêts! bois profonds! solitude! asiles! [Oh forests! profound woods! solitude! sanctuaries!]' (336; *OC*, V, 337). While the frenzied multitude in 'Melancholia' fears the hidden seed that lies latently potent, the 'saxifrage' poet does not. Hugo roots the cause of Paris's predilection for fleeting and material pleasures in a ravaged field that calls for healing:

Les carrefours sont pleins de choc et de combats.
Les multitudes vont et viennent dans les rues.
Foules! sillons creusés par ces mornes charrues:
Nuit, douleur, deuil! champ triste où souvent a germé
Un épi qui fait peur à ceux qui l'ont semé! (254–8; *OC*, V, 335)

[The crossroads are full of shock and fights.
The multitudes come and go in the streets.
Crowds! furrows dug by these doleful ploughs:
Night, sadness, grief! sad field where often has germinated
A seed that frightens those who sowed it!]

'Melancholia' shows how the poet's contemplation of nature has evolved into a call for social change beyond a point of impasse in 'La Nature'. Both poems feature a menacing image of trees (nature) morphing into gallows (society), but the poet comes to recognise that the processes of nature signal the way to a healthier, stronger collective. The 'miracle' force of nature, to which Hugo refers in a never-finished preface for *Les Misérables*, is one that modern society can emulate in order to evolve: 'rendez-vous compte, entre autres miracles, de la force de la végétation.

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Un brin d'herbe soulève un bloc d'argile; au mois d'août 1860, un champignon, pour se faire passage, a bossué et brisé le pavé d'asphalte sur la place de la Bastille, à Paris. Toute la terre est un creuset [take into account, among other miracles, the force of vegetation. A blade of grass lifts up a block of clay; in August 1860, a mushroom, in order to make room for its growth, dented and broke the asphalt pavement on Bastille Square in Paris]' (*OC*, XIII (1990), 471).[32] The work of natural forces, even in Paris, inspires a vision in which France's 'misérables', downtrodden but tenacious, will spread, toppling the corrupt and the greedy along the way.

'Les Misérables': a field of poppies

A rallying cry in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' makes it clear that *Les Contemplations* flow into *Les Misérables*: 'Espérez! espérez! espérez, misérables! [Hope! hope! hope, ye wretched!]' (701; *OC*, V, 550). Hugo raises an explicit polemic against artificial flowers in the 'Préface philosophique [Philosophical Preface]', where a warped 'besoin d'idéal [need for the ideal]' corrupts the flower's beauty, and condemns it to serve the deeds of prostitutes and criminals: 'Allez-vous-en! Votre éden m'épouvante. Je frémis [Get out! Your Eden terrifies me. I shudder]' (*OC*, XIII, 527). The poems of *Les Contemplations* are microcosms that open into the universal macrocosm of the novel, perceived by Rimbaud as 'un vrai *poème* [a true *poem*]'.[33]

In an echo of 'Melancholia', the motif of a damaged field – symbolising a fractured relationship between nature and society – develops to a dramatic degree in the fourth book of *Les Misérables*.[34] 'La Cadène [The Chain-Gang]' (IV.3.viii),[35] whose setting is a poorly ploughed field in the amorphous periphery of Paris, presents a hybrid landscape in which the conflict between nature and culture comes to a head as the metropolis experiences the growing pains of urban expansion and moves into the surrounding countryside:

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32 From the posthumously published 'Préface philosophique'.

33 Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies; Une saison en enfer; Illuminations*, ed. by L. Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 92 [letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871]. Victor Brombert notes the unconventionality and hybrid quality of Hugo's novels, and how they must be approached as new epic poems that sing 'the moral adventure of man'. Victor Brombert, *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 7.

34 This book vaunts the appropriately antithetical and global title 'L'Idylle rue Plumet et l'épopée rue Saint-Denis [The Idyll of Plumet Street and the Epic of Saint-Denis Street]'.

35 This chapter was added in exile in 1860 during Hugo's full immersion in the Channel Islands.

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> Il y avait alors aux environs des barrières de Paris des espèces de champs pauvres, presque mêlés à la ville, où il poussait, l'été, un blé maigre, et qui, l'automne, après la récolte faite, n'avaient pas l'air moissonnés, mais pelés. Jean Valjean les hantait avec prédilection. (*OC*, II (1985), 716)
>
> [There were at that time in the surroundings of the barriers of Paris some kinds of shoddy fields, almost mixed in with the city, where there grew, in summer, puny wheat, and which, in autumn, after the harvest was completed, did not look reaped, but stripped. Jean Valjean had a predilection for haunting these fields.]

Though scarred by the encroaching city and inexpert agricultural practices, the abused land persistently yields healthy flowers that attract bees and butterflies. While Jean Valjean is happy to cling to the hybrid landscape (like the saxifrage in rock fissures), young Cosette is a modern nymph who represents the infinite possibilities of nature's healing and rebirth as she flits through the field. In this unassuming, ugly terrain, local meets global as the delicate poppies 'blaze' in the sun's heat:

> Cosette ne s'y ennuyait pas. […] Elle tressait en guirlandes des coquelicots qu'elle mettait sur sa tête, et qui, traversés et pénétrés de soleil, empourprés jusqu'au flamboiement, faisaient à ce frais visage rose une couronne de braises. (*OC*, II, 716)
>
> [Cosette did not become bored there. […] From poppies she fashioned garlands that she put on her head, and that, having become a flaming violet colour due to being traversed and penetrated by the sun, used to make a crown of embers around her fresh pink face.]

The answer to society's fallen ways is to re-establish an ecosystem, no matter how fragile or seemingly out of place, on the fringes of Paris. Hugo, by planting a field of poppies and butterflies at the heart of *Les Misérables*, evolves from poetics to praxis.

A humble poem can help us read Hugo's chapter as a piece motivated by an ecopoetics that lets native and wild flowers flourish in order to heal scars inflicted by human materialism. Jonathan Bate, underscoring the connections between words and the world, 'the capacity for the writer to restore us to the earth',[36] reads John Keats's ode 'To Autumn' (1820)[37] as a 'well-regulated ecosystem' of 'biodiversity' in which the poet 'celebrates the stubble' of the autumn harvest: 'the ecosystem of "To Autumn" is something larger than an image of agribusiness'.[38] Bate demonstrates how the poet's accurately meteorological account of the autumnal day

36 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vii.

37 John Keats, 'To Autumn', in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*: *1250–1900*, ed. by A. Quiller-Couch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 733–4.

38 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 106.

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exemplifies an ecopoetic consciousness. Showcasing the therapeutic and holistic benefits of nature in spite of the consumerist spirit of the 'age of ecocide',[39] Keats grounds the dynamics of his poem in the temporal and intermeshed workings of the earth, its atmosphere and its inhabitants. The ploughed field in the poem yields a sensuous and abundantly fertile network, in which the hum of bees and the 'winnowing wind' meld with 'fumes of poppies', but the ultimate harvest is the one enacted by the poet through the medium of tactile language as he cultivates a vital, 'oozing' potency on the basis of the particularly mild autumn of 1819.

In common with Keats, Hugo stresses meteorological specificities – the narrator refers to 'la sérénité parfaite de l'automne 1831[the perfect serenity of autumn 1831]', and the crepuscular 'minute' of dawn (*OC*, II, 716) –, takes note of the multitude of poppies (flowers which, as Bate points out, are not only associated with goddess Diana and pre-agrarian myth, but with physical medicinal properties),[40] and composes what the narrator calls a 'hymne de la petitesse à l'infini [hymn of smallness to the infinite]' (*OC*, II, 716), in which a whole universe responds to minute changes prompted by human activity. The recently bloomed Cosette, enamoured of Marius, knows better than to catch butterflies, and the crucial human sentiment of pity that spares flora and fauna in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' resurfaces: 'les mansuétudes et les attendrissements naissent avec l'amour, et la jeune fille, qui a en elle un idéal tremblant et fragile, a pitié de l'aile du papillon [indulgence and tenderness are born with love, and the young woman, who has within her a trembling and fragile ideal, takes pity on the butterfly's wing]' (*OC*, II, 716). The damaged, but fertile, landscape of La Barrière du Maine [The Maine Barrier] is a natural habitat for a duo victimised by a perverse society (Jean Valjean as a convict; Cosette as an orphan), and become more resilient because of it. In both instances, the soporific poppies, not merely present for aesthetic pleasure, call out: to the consumptive Keats in 'To Autumn'; to the oppressed of France in *Les Misérables*.

Hugo, dramatically diverging from Keats, merges his modern eclogue with the harrowing intrusion of a chain gang. Beaten like the scarred field alongside which they pass, the wretched prisoners are living spectres of society's vices; they might as well be trees or rocks in the eyes of those who consider this event to be a spectacle on a par with a ball, and they become inert objects in the eyes of the crowd of bystanders: 'il était impossible de ne pas frémir en voyant ces créatures humaines liées ainsi et passives sous les froides nuées d'automne, et livrées à la pluie, à la bise, à toutes les furies de l'air, comme des arbres et comme des pierres [it was impossible

39 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 102.

40 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 106.

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not to shudder when seeing these human creatures thus chained together and passive under the cold clouds of autumn, exposed to the rain, the wind, and all the furies of the air, like trees and stones]' (*OC*, II, 719). As in 'Melancholia', those who suffer do so because nature suffers, yet the horror of such a landscape gives a full picture of nature's destructive and healing processes. 'Le mal [Evil]', Hugo explains, 'étant de l'ombre, est derrière la matière. Tourner la matière, c'est le devoir de l'intelligence [being of the shadows, is behind matter. Turning over matter is the duty of intelligence]' (*OC*, XIII, 554 ['Préface philosophique']). The 'mal' represented by the chain gang (to which Jean Valjean was once tethered) is redeemed by the fact that poppies can grow amid such distress. Flowers, bees and butterflies appear once the stubbled field is 'turned over' by Jean Valjean's awareness of the workings of the environment, from soil to sun: 'se promener de grand matin, pour qui aime la solitude, équivaut à se promener la nuit, avec la gaîté de la nature de plus. [...] La pente de Jean Valjean était, on le sait, d'aller aux endroits peu fréquentés, aux recoins solitaires, aux lieux d'oubli [walking at the height of morning, for someone who likes solitude, is like walking at night, with the gaiety of nature in addition. [...] Jean Valjean's penchant was, as we know, to go to out-of-the-way places, to solitary recesses, to forgotten places]' (*OC*, II, 716). In the same era as Hugo's writings, Charles Darwin adopts his own kind of ecopoetic prose to describe the aggressive, but beautiful, persistence of nature that Jean Valjean incarnates:

> As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications.[41]

Though the human scissors snip the rose, poppies and saxifrage compensate for the mutilation.

Conclusion

Hugo's eco-awareness starts with poetry, as *Les Contemplations* represent a growing understanding of poetry as a network that responds to the global and invisible dynamics of nature's forces. Hugo, by way of evolving characters and a focus on the rubble of history in *Les Misérables*, systematically turns over 'broken branches' to let flourish a universal Tree of Life rooted in love that nourishes and holds the promise of regeneration for a decrepit society. It is not only through words, but

41 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by J. Huxley (New York, NY: Signet, 2003), 132.

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through action, that *Les Misérables* reflects a proto-environmentalist literary text that anticipates ecogardens, recycling of waste, and the usefulness of disregarded or marginal spaces.[42] Hugo's environmental consciousness theorises a nature that gains strength in the face of humanity's destructive impulses.

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42 For an examination of the increasingly environmental role of the garden in Hugo's novel, see Karen F. Quandt, '"Foliis ac frondibus": *Les Misérables* and the Ecogarden', in *'Les Misérables' and Its Afterlives: Between Page, Stage, and Screen*, ed. by K. M. Grossman and B. Stephens (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 33–47. Hugo's meditation on Paris's sewers is a famous example of a discourse on recycling, and Marius's frequent visits to abandoned fields or old farmers' markets anticipate contemporary conservation efforts.

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Claire Nettleton

Fauves in the *Faubourg*: Animal Aesthetics in Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*

Abstract: In the second preface to *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Émile Zola expresses his novelistic mission to observe the 'beastly' characters of Thérèse and Laurent, and to 'chercher en eux la bête'. While this section of the preface is traditionally read as a degradation of the characters as subhuman, I inquire whether presenting Thérèse and Laurent as animals could be the basis of an empowering and revolutionary non-anthropocentric aesthetic. On one hand, Zola's deterministic and singular view of animals reduces behaviour to the primal drives of bestial lust and bloodthirsty wrath. On the other, this set of supposedly negative characteristics shocks traditional artistic sensibilities and humanist claims to superiority over other creatures. In this regard, Zola's Naturalism, which considers characters' milieu, heredity and animal instincts, brings together contemporary scholarly concerns that redirect our focus beyond a uniquely human experience. In my analysis of *Thérèse Raquin*, I integrate the work of Michel Serres, who expands our approach to literary criticism by shifting our attention beyond human-centred readings of texts, and the work of Gilles Deleuze, who affirms animals as a creative rupture from the *status quo*. I argue that Zola creates a radical aesthetic that erodes the thin façade of civilisation by focussing on non-human forces lingering alongside and within mankind, yet the limitations of the time period mean that such non-human forces are very much a humanist construction. Taking account of negative depictions of animals and nature in the novel, I assert that an examination of *Thérèse Raquin* in its own eco-historical context allows us to discover the seeds of an artistic revolution that is, in many ways, non-anthropocentric.

Beyond factory smokestacks, past the ramparts of the bustling capital, a woman and two men lie on the banks of the Seine basking in the sun. What could be a tranquil scene akin to Gustave Courbet's *Les Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* (1857) or Édouard Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) erupts in deadly violence as one man, overcome with passion, drowns the other. Such is the story of Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), in which Thérèse and her lover Laurent, a brutish artist, conspire to kill Camille, a pale bureaucrat who fears the natural world, and who comes to haunt the adulterers. This early tale of murder and desire, Zola's third novel, and a precursor to his twenty-part Rougon-Macquart series, is a classic that has inspired numerous critiques. According to John Lapp, the Seine is a

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theatrical backdrop and a symbol of death.[1] Could the river actually be read as a river, though, an essential part of the ecosystem, which becomes tainted once it flows into the city? Zola presents the outskirts of Saint-Ouen, annexed to Paris in 1860, as a space of untrammelled nature that unleashes supposedly 'animal instincts'.

In the second preface to *Thérese Raquin*, which addresses outraged critics, Zola declares that his mission as a novelist was to examine the loutish characters of Thérèse and Laurent; to 'chercher en eux la bête, ne voir même que la bête, les jeter dans un drame violent et noter scrupuleusement les sensations et les actes de ces êtres [seek within them the animal, even to see in them only the animal, to plunge them together in a violent drama and then take scrupulous note of their sensations and actions]'.[2] Zola explains that the lovers are 'des brutes humaines, rien de plus [Thérèse and Laurent are human animals, nothing more]' (*Z* 8; *R* 1–2) because they are guided by their passions and instincts. This section of the preface is traditionally read as a degradation of the characters into a subhuman, and thus inferior, condition. My chapter, by contrast, poses the question of whether presenting Thérèse and Laurent as animals could be empowering and the basis of a radical, non-anthropocentric aesthetic. Zola's impressionistic novel undermines human emotions, values and achievements, and underscores animal functioning. In this regard, Zola's writing mirrors the concerns of contemporary animal studies, which destabilise humanist claims to superiority over other creatures. I argue that Zola creates a revolutionary aesthetic, which erodes the thin façade of civilisation, by focussing on non-human forces that linger alongside and within mankind – such forces nonetheless remain a human construction due to the limitations of the period.

Zola's determinist argument essentialises animal nature as a fixed set of primitive drives. Such a reductionist perspective neither encapsulates the infinite variety of a multitude of species and individual beings (as famously theorised by Jacques Derrida),[3] nor does it suggest the harmonious possibilities of cross-species companionship (as suggested by Susan McHugh).[4] Zola's view – that beyond the

1 John C. Lapp, *Zola before the Rougon-Macquart* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 95.

2 Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, ed. by E. Fasquelle (Paris: Fasquelle, 1953), 9 [hereafter *Z*]; *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. by A. Rothwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2 [hereafter *R*].

3 Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, ed. by M.-L. Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

4 Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

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surface of refined humans dwells an 'inner animal' waiting to claw itself free – arose, in part, from physiological theory that was circulating at the time.[5] Zola had read Clémence Royer's translation of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*,[6] and it can be argued, as Ross Shideler does, that Zola's particularly Darwinian view of animal nature, which 'narrativized humans within a physically determined universe', is biocentric because he 'was the first modern novelist to treat his characters *as* and not *like* animals'.[7]

Animals in French ecocriticism

How can our examination of theriomorphs in Zola's œuvre enrich our understanding of French ecocriticism? The interest in animals during the nineteenth century in scientific and literary texts did not appear in a vacuum; rather, it occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The loss of wildlife, coupled with the advent of theories of evolution, caused nineteenth-century citizens to re-evaluate their connection with other species of life. Lawrence Buell has highlighted the lack of attention given to animals in ecocritical discourse,[8] yet the two disciplines should be considered synergic due to their focus on a shared life amongst a multitude of species. The battle between Laurent and Camille mirrors the conflict between wildlife and civilisation in Haussmannian Paris. The men's struggle brings to mind Michel Serres's analysis of Goya's *Men Fighting with Sticks* (1823), in which two men fight in quicksand. Although we concentrate on the two opponents, the focus should be the marsh into which they are plunging. Serres's notion, when applied to literary theory, shifts the emphasis away from human-centred readings of texts – allowing us to take notice of characters' interactions with each other and the earth. 'Quicksand is swallowing the duelists, the river is threatening the fighter: earth, waters, and climate, the mute world, the voiceless things once placed as a décor

5 Predating Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles, et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857) considers the possession of atavistic traits to be an inherited pathological deviance. Bénédict A. Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris: Baillière, 1857).

6 *Steven McLean*, '"*The Golden Fly*": *Darwinism and Degeneration in Émile Zola's Nana*', *College Literature* 39.3 (2012), 61–83 (67).

7 Ross Shideler, *Questioning the Father: From Darwin to Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hardy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

8 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 7–8.

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surrounding the usual spectacles, all those things that never interested anyone, from now on thrust themselves brutally and without warning into our schemes and maneuvers'.[9] The forces of nature are more than a mere setting of a plot; they are an integral part of the story.

In Haussmannian Paris, however, wilderness was difficult to find. In Zola's story, the characters are confined to move between the city and its outskirts. Jennifer Forrest has noted that, in Decadent fiction, the suburbs – or what she calls 'faux-bourgs', wooded ramparts that are not quite dense forests – were marginal spaces between city and country that gave the illusion of nature.[10] Given that *Thérèse Raquin* takes place in Parisian environs, and it presents the human animal as deadly, carnal and base, should the novel be considered within the framework of animal studies and, more broadly, the discipline of ecocriticism? Daniel Finch-Race and Julian Weber argue that the nineteenth century produced particularly fruitful works of literature due to the newfound awareness of environmental encroachment.[11] This crisis regarding humans' relationship to their ecological milieu is the source of a revolutionary aesthetic that sought to unveil the human animal. Zola writes in the preface to the second edition that *Thérèse Raquin* is 'l'étude du tempérament et des modifications profondes de l'organisme sous la pression des milieux et des circonstances [the study of the temperaments and the profound modifications brought about in the human organism by the pressure of surroundings and circumstances]' (*Z* 12; *R* 5). Zola's view parallels the perspective of German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who in 1866 introduced the term 'ecology' to mean 'the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment, including, in the broad sense, all the conditions of existence'.[12] Zola's naturalism, which considers characters' milieu, heredity and animal instincts brings together contemporary scholarly concerns, which redirect our focus beyond a uniquely human experience.

Zola's literary aesthetic attempted to bridge the chasm between man and nature by examining humans within a complex web of life, and by revealing animal instincts within man. Zola claims to apply an experimental methodology to

9 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. by E. MacArthur and W. Paulson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.

10 Jennifer Forrest, 'Paris *à Rebours*: Where Huysmans Put the *Faux* in *Faubourg*', *South Atlantic Review* 62.2 (1997), 10–28 (12).

11 Daniel A. Finch-Race and Julien Weber, 'Editorial: The Ecocritical Stakes of French Poetry from the Industrial Era', *Dix-Neuf* 19.3 (2015), 159–66 (160).

12 Ernst Haeckel, translated in Robert C. Stauffer, 'Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology', *Quarterly Review of Biology* 32.2 (1957), 138–44 (140–1).

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literature, just as Claude Bernard did with medicine,[13] recording the supposedly observable and objective physical functioning of a subject in relation to its 'intra-organic' milieu.[14] Influenced by Hippolyte Taine, Darwin and Honoré de Balzac's concept that humans are animals shaped by environmental conditioning, Zola claims that Man is 'une bête pensante, qui fait partie de la grande nature qui est soumise aux multiples influences du sol où elle vit [a thinking animal that takes part in the great nature that is subject to the multiple influences of the ground where one lives]'.[15] I will elucidate the ways in which Zola's work reveals the point of intersection between animal and man.

Contemporary animal theorists have argued that theriomorphic imagery is not a mere metaphor for human existence.[16] Although critics tend to focus on contemporary anglophone literature, I wish to examine animal concerns within a nineteenth-century French literary context. In the introduction to *French Thinking about Animals*, Stephanie Posthumus and Louisa Mackenzie dispel the belief that French intellectuals have been disinterested in animals due to post-Cartesian biases.[17] Since the nineteenth century, animals have played a central role in French art by destabilising dominant perspectives: Courbet placed an angora cat at the heart of his masterpiece *L'Atelier du peintre* (1855), which reflects the unpredictable spirit of the avant-garde.

I propose that we look to the ways in which French vanguard aesthetic theories blur the divide between human and non-human life. The parallels between the novel and paintings of the nineteenth century avant-garde have been noted by scholars such as Lapp, who proposes that Laurent is an amalgam of Claude Monet and Zola's childhood friend Paul Cézanne. I expand upon Susan Harrow's interpretation of *Thérèse Raquin* as a 'conflict between cultural norms and instinctual behaviour'[18] by proposing a reading that focusses on dichotomies between

13 Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Baillière, 1865).

14 Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1880), 27.

15 Zola, *Le Roman*, 122 [unreferenced translations are mine].

16 McHugh, *Animal Stories*, 8.

17 Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, 'Introduction', in *French Thinking about Animals*, ed. by L. Mackenzie and S. Posthumus (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), xv–xxii (xvii).

18 Susan Harrow, '*Thérèse Raquin*: Animal Passion and the Brutality of Reading,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by B. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105–20 (111).

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urban/rural environments and human/animal subjects, and their relationship to the creative process.

Thérèse Raquin can be read alongside works by Deleuze and Guattari that affirm animals as a creative rupture from the *status quo*. It is useful to discuss the similarities and differences between Zola's avant-garde aesthetic, manifested in Laurent's works of art, and the notion of 'becoming-animal'[19] within the context of Francis Bacon's paintings from the mid-twentieth century. According to Deleuze, the painter's violent images of cuts of meat are examples of a painting of sensation that induce horror and pity. Deleuze also notes that Bacon's work operates a system that encloses a figure in a particular space. The relationship between figure and field is not metaphorical; it illustrates the subject's interdependence with its environment. 'If the fields function as a background, they do so by virtue of their strict correlation with the Figures. *It is the correlation of two sectors on a single plane, equally close*'.[20] I assert that Zola creates a literary 'painting of sensation' that shocks bourgeois sensibilities and undermines aesthetic principles. It is difficult to designate the fictional character of Laurent as a vanguard radical whose art overturns traditional human(ist) values. I nonetheless assert that by examining *Thérèse Raquin* with its own eco-historical context in mind, we will discover the seeds of an artistic revolution that is, in many ways, non-anthropocentric.

Urban Paris

The year of 1867, four years after Manet's *Olympia* and five years after the French translation of *The Origin of Species*, witnessed a wealth of societal and cultural transitions: Haussmann's urban reconfigurations were redefining the concept of nature as something distant and removed from daily life; the city doubled in size, devouring fields in its wake; urbanites experienced a longing to reconnect with wildlife because they felt detached from nature; jaunts to the outskirts of Paris for picnicking and play became a popular literary and artistic subject.[21] Zola's texts, and their visual counterpart in Realist and proto-Impressionist paintings, sought to reveal a primal communion with the environment that was lost in daily life.

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19 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by D. Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 35.

20 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by D. W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), 5 [original emphasis].

21 Forrest, 'Paris *à Rebours*', 11.

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Thérèse Raquin transitions from a bucolic tale to a horrific gothic novel after Madame Raquin, Camille and Thérèse move from quaint Vernon to the centre of Paris. The story's dark and sinister backdrop is rooted in historical accounts of pollution: by 1845, over three hundred French industries were categorised as unsanitary, inconvenient or dangerous facilities; pollution from steam engines and factories was causing paint to chip, and materials to fade.[22] The Raquins' boutique apotheosises this urban hell: 'par les beaux jours d'été, quand un lourd soleil brûle les rues, une clarté blanchâtre tombe des vitres très sales et traine misérablement dans le passage [on fine summer days when the sun beats oppressively down on the streets outside, a pallid light filters in through the filthy panes and lingers miserably in the passage]' (*Z* 9; *R* 7). The shop is a battleground between lightness and darkness; sunshine struggles to penetrate the sullied interior. This contrast is not merely a symbolic war between good and evil, or a well-crafted chiaroscuro for purely aesthetic reasons. I propose that the darkness illustrates the genuine threat of pollution and urban filth ('sales').

Thérèse's nature

For Zola, the non-human is a space of temporary liberation from societal and creative constraints. Thérèse embodies the frustrated condition of the nineteenth-century citizen who yearns to return to nature, but cannot escape the stifling confines of the social order. The product of an affair between Madame Raquin's brother and the beautiful daughter of an Algerian tribal chieftain, Thérèse emblematises the stereotype of being wild and close to nature. This description of Thérèse reveals naturalism's problematic determinism. Zola suggests that the native Algerian possesses a singular and fixed 'natural essence', largely repressed by the conventions of Western civilisation, but occasionally resurfacing. For Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming-animal' is never a 'natural state' but rather a continual process of transformation that has no origin.[23] Zola's novel, by contrast, idealises a so-called 'primitive' state akin to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *bon sauvage* [good savage]: 'j'avais des besoins de grand air; toute petite, je rêvais de courir les chemins, les pieds nus dans la poussière, demandant l'aumône,

22 Ilja Mieck, 'Reflections on a Typology of Historical Pollution: Complementary Conceptions', in *The Silent Countdown: Essays in European Environmental History*, ed. by P. Brimblecombe and C. Pfister (Berlin: Springer, 1990), 73–80 (77).

23 Audronė Žukauskaitė, 'Ethics between Particularity and Universality', in *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. by N. Jun and D. W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 188–206 (193).

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vivant en bohémienne [I had a desperate need for wide-open spaces; as a little girl, I dreamt of roaming barefoot along dusty roads, begging alms and living the life of a gypsy]' (*Z* 59; *R* 37). Thérèse expresses nostalgia for a pre-industrial era that manifests itself as memories of Algeria or the town of Vernon.

Thérèse also experiences a kinship with Saint-Ouen: 'Saint-Ouen, avec ces îles vertes, lui rappelait Vernon; elle y sentait se réveiller toutes les amitiés sauvages qu'elle avait eues pour la Seine, étant jeune fille [Saint-Ouen and its green islands reminded her of Vernon; when she was there, all the wild affection she had felt for the Seine as a young girl was reawakened within her]' (*Z* 86; *R* 57–8). Zola presents a fantasy of the outskirts as wild forests, in which a non-Parisian may feel in harmony with the pulse of life. The Seine is wild in Vernon, vicious in Saint-Ouen, and tame in Paris, where it flows by the Raquins' boutique. Thérèse, like the river, is tamed in Paris, and ordered to be silent and docile:

> Je ne pouvais bouger, ma tante grondait que je fais trop de bruit… plus tard, j'ai goûté des joies profondes dans la petite maison du bord de l'eau; mais j'étais déjà abêtie, je ne savais à peine marcher, je tombais lorsque je courais. Puis, on m'a enterrée toute vive dans cette ignoble boutique.
>
> [I couldn't even move around; my aunt used to scold me whenever I made a noise… Later on, I did have a taste of real joy, in the little house by the river, but by then I had already been too much repressed; I could hardly walk and I fell whenever I tried to run. Then they buried me alive in this awful shop.] (*Z* 59; *R* 38)

Thérèse is like a caged animal that, if briefly freed, no longer has the skills or the bodily strength to function in the wild, and is rendered non-functional by being deprived of her environment.

Zola's scalpel-pen supposedly unveils Thérèse's 'natural instincts', temporarily suppressed by Madame Raquin's conditioning, when Thérèse experiences the garden at Vernon:

> Quand elle était seule, dans l'herbe, au bord de l'eau, elle se couchait à plat ventre comme une bête, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, près de bondir. Et elle restait là, pendant des heures, ne pensant à rien, mordue par le soleil, heureuse d'enfoncer ses doigts dans la terre.
>
> [When she was down by the water's edge on her own she would lie full-length in the grass like an animal, her black eyes wide open, her body twisted in readiness to pounce. And there she would stay for hours, thinking about nothing in particular, feeling the bite of the sun's rays on her body, happy just to dig her fingers into the earth.] (*Z* 33; *R* 14)

Sprinkling a series of prepositions alongside natural elements ('Dans l'herbe'; 'au bord de l'eau'; 'par le soleil'; 'dans la terre'), Zola emphasises the importance of the character's environment to her physical being ('les yeux noirs et grandis, le corps

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tordu'; 'enfoncer ses doigts'). By interacting with the river, the grass, the earth and the sun, Thérèse returns to a so-called 'animal' state.

It can be argued that Thérèse and Laurent temporarily experience freedom from cultural constraints in their animal-like metamorphoses. When Camille provokes Thérèse, 'la jeune fille se releva d'un bond avec une sauvagerie de bête, et la face ardente, les yeux rouges, elle se précipita sur lui, les deux bras levés [she leapt up at once like a wild animal, with her cheeks red and eyes blazing with anger, and threw herself on him with both fists raised]' (*Z* 27; *R* 16). The novel portrays Thérèse as a foreign creature, whose instinct to hunt is never fully sublimated. Darwin writes in *The Origin of Species* that 'all wolves, foxes, jackals and species of the cat genus, when kept tame, are most eager to attack poultry, sheep and pigs; and this tendency has been found incurable in dogs which have been brought home as puppies from countries such as Tierra del Fuego and Australia'.[24] Zola depicts Thérèse as a species of feline whose lethal impulses resist domestication.

When Thérèse and Laurent engage in a sexual liaison in front of the Raquins' tabby François, Thérèse imagines the cat's account of the event:

> 'Monsieur et Madame s'embrassent très-fort dans la chambre; ils ne sont pas méfiés de moi, mais comme leurs amours criminels me dégoûtent, je vous prie de les faire mettre en prison tous les deux; ils ne troubleront plus ma sieste.'
>
> Thérèse plaisantait comme un enfant, elle mimait le chat, elle allongeait les mains en façon de griffes, elle donnait à ses épaules des ondulations félines.
>
> ['Monsieur and Madame get up to all sorts of naughty things together in the bedroom; they take no notice of me, but since their illicit affair makes me sick, please put them both in prison so they won't disturb my nap in the future.'
>
> Thérèse joked about like a child, imitating the cat by stretching out her fingers into claws and rolling her shoulders in feline undulations.] (*Z* 53; *R* 41)

Lethbridge argues that a contemporaneous reader of the novel would have associated François with the black cat in *Olympia*, a symbol of sexual perversity and vanguard rebellion, as the Raquins' feline 'assumes the status of a character in his own right'.[25] In his 1866 study of *Olympia*, Zola comments on the cat's subversive presence: 'un chat, vous imaginiez-vous cela? [a cat, can you imagine that?]'.[26] The

24 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by J. Wallace (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), 165.

25 Robert Lethbridge, 'Zola, Manet and *Thérèse Raquin*', *French Studies* 34.3 (1980), 278–99 (291).

26 Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by H. Mitterand, vol. 12 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1969), 804.

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Raquins' cat – the namesake of François I, who standardised the French language – undermines the supposedly rigid distinction between humans and animals that is based on the ability to speak. Thérèse imagines the cat to be the spokesperson of morality and institutional preservation, in contrast to the bodily desires that drive the behaviour of Thérèse and Laurent. Just as Thérèse's hands slide into a claw-like pose, Laurent slips into the animal realm.

Artist of the earth

By placing animals at the very centre of his aesthetic process, Zola denies the traditional association between art and human exceptionalism. Anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake proposes that art, which she calls 'making special', 'refers to the fact that humans, unlike other animals, intentionally shape, embellish, and otherwise fashion aspects of their world to make these more than ordinary'.[27] By contrast, art historian Giovanni Aloi critiques the notion that animals cannot produce art, and disavows the received idea that animals' abilities – programmed and unconscious – are inferior to those of humans, which are supposedly conscious and inspired.[28] When Thérèse encounters Laurent, the artist's bull-like physique inspires a visceral reaction in the young woman:

> On sentait sous ses vêtements des muscles ronds et développés, tout un corps avec une chair épaisse et ferme. Et Thérèse l'examinait avec curiosité, allant de ses poings à sa face, éprouvant de petit frissons lorsque ses yeux rencontraient son cou de taureau.
>
> [Beneath his clothes, one could make out the well-developed and bulging muscles and the firm, solid flesh of his body. Thérèse looked him up and down with great curiosity, from his fists to his face, and a little shiver ran through her when her glance settled on his bull's neck.] (*Z* 42–3; *R* 26).

Laurent, who produces crudely modern art, possesses an 'animal-like' constitution that is symbolised by the abandonment of the fields of his father's farm in pursuit of an artistic lifestyle supposedly leading to food, women and leisure (44). Lethbridge argues that Laurent's character is a parody of scathing portrayals of modern painters such as Manet,[29] and Matthew Josephson's description of Zola's childhood friend Paul Cézanne is reminiscent of Laurent: 'he was a "bear",

27 Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 30.

28 Giovanni Aloi, *Art & Animals* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), xix.

29 Lethbridge. 'Zola', 291.

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a character, with a rude crust'.[30] Similarly, as an animal-artist, Laurent paints only to satisfy his basic needs of eating, sleeping and copulating. To what extent, then, does he represent Zola's revolutionarily naturalist aesthetic?

> Ses premiers essais étaient restés au-dessous de la médiocrité; son œil de paysan voyait gauchement et salement la nature; ses toiles, boueuse, mal bâties, grimaçantes, défiaient toute critique.
>
> [His first attempts had never even reached the level of mediocrity; with his farmer's eye, he had a clumsy and messy view of nature, and his canvases, muddy-looking, ill-composed, and grimacing, defied all critical appreciation.] (*Z* 45; *R* 28).

Laurent's upbringing in the countryside causes his eye to be physiologically different from that of artists trained in the city, producing awkward and defiant landscapes. Zola's portrayal of Laurent echoes the author's description of the writing process, which outraged critics for being 'obscene':

> L'humanité des modèles disparaissait comme elle disparaît aux yeux de l'artiste qui a une femme nue vautrée devant lui, et qui songe uniquement à mettre cette femme sur sa toile dans la vérité de ses formes et de ses colorations. Aussi ma surprise a-t-elle été grande quand j'ai entendu traiter mon œuvre de flaque de boue et de sang, d'égout, d'immondice, que sais-je?
>
> [The humanity of the models disappeared for me as it does for the artist who has a naked women stretched before him, and whose only thought is to put down on his canvas the truth of her form and coloration. Great, therefore, was my surprise when I heard my work called a cesspit of blood and filth, a stinking sewer, an abomination, and I forget what else.] (*Z* 9; *R* 3)

The references to mud and filth in Laurent's and Zola's depictions create an aesthetic that is rooted in the earth. For Zola, writing is a process of dissolving a subject's humanity: he observes characters in the same way that a painter intensely focusses on the detailed lines and shades of his model's physique; he abandons sentimental narrative or identity as a human subject. In that sense, the Naturalist is similar to Bacon, whose project is '*to dismantle the face*',[31] the traits that make up an individual human being. Deleuze writes that the abandonment of figuration is a fundamental characteristic of modern painting: in Bacon's case,

> It is the confrontation of the Figure and the field, their solitary wrestling in a *shallow depth*, that rips the painting away from all narrative but also from all symbolization. When

30 Matthew Josephson, *Zola and His Time* (New York, NY: Macaulay, 1928), 115.

31 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 20 [original emphasis].

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> narrative or symbolic, figuration obtains only the bogus violence of the represented or the signified; it expresses nothing of the violence of sensation.[32]

For Deleuze, the painting of sensation is a violent explosion that occurs on a physical level; it undermines artistic convention, and creates the possibility of new forms and dimensions. Bacon creates a 'zone of objective indecision between man and animal',[33] and 'this objective zone of indiscernibility is the entire body, but the body insofar as it is flesh or meat'.[34] In Zola's work, there is little indecision about human nature as 'beast-like'. Instead of unsettling the notion of the animal and the human, Zola solidifies a notion of the human animal, constructed in terms of lust or horror. On one hand, Zola's deterministic and singular view of animals reduces all behaviour to a set of primal drives; on the other, this set of supposedly negative characteristics shocks conventional aesthetic sensibilities and value systems. Laurent foreshadows Camille's drowning by painting him as a cadaver in a portrait: 'il avait, malgré lui, exagéré les teintes blafardes de son modèle, et le visage de Camille ressemblait à la face verdâtre d'un noyé [he had unwittingly exaggerated the pallid skin-tones of his model, and Camille's face had the greenish hue of drowned man]' (*Z* 53; *R* 34). By depicting this civil servant as a puddle of ghastly colours and unwieldy lines, Laurent slays Camille's elite standing, and reduces him to flesh. In a similar fashion, the morgue becomes a modern museum, in which nudes decompose into multicoloured blotches.

Impressionistic slaughter

Chapter eleven, the murder scene, can be read as a series of textual tableaux that strip away the thin veil of humanity. During the year in which *Thérèse Raquin* was written, Zola used to fish by boat at Bennecourt, a village on the right bank of the Seine, seventy kilometres west of Saint-Ouen; his friends Cézanne, Manet and Camille Pissarro often used to join him. Zola's eleventh chapter is often compared to Courbet's *Les Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. This raises the question of whether the conflict between urban society and the animal world lies at the very heart of those proto-Impressionist paintings. T. J. Clark writes that the Parisian environs were an important mode of escape from the urban centre for nineteenth-century life; they created the illusion that

32 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, xiv.

33 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 25.

34 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 22.

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the city was distant.[35] In Zola's novel, Saint-Ouen is portrayed as a gateway to a primal forest, in which the rules of civilisation are temporarily suspended, and the aesthetic landscape is completely transformed. Thérèse, Laurent and Camille leave their coach at the fortifications, and complete the journey on foot. The dusty road, burned by the blinding sun leads to the shaded shelter of Saint-Ouen, where the trio rests under a bouquet of trees upon a blanket of shaded grass (89). An uncountable number of trees, which appear like gothic columns, surround the group: 'les branches descendaient jusque sur le front des promeneurs, qui avaient ainsi pour tout horizon la voûte cuivrée des feuillages mourants […]. Tout autour d'eux, ils entendaient la Seine gronder [the branches came down to head-height, so that the strollers' horizon was hemmed in by a copper-coloured vault of dying leaves […] All around them they could hear the rumbling of the Seine]' (*Z* 90; *R* 59). The tree-trunks and foliage create a frame enclosing the characters in a melancholic tableau that foreshadows the untamed nature of the organic world. The flora of Saint-Ouen, along with the sound of its moaning river, completely dominates this scene, and envelops all traces of human existence. The three protagonists are cloistered and isolated in their specific milieu. For outcasts like Thérèse and Laurent, whose passions have no place in an urban centre, their animal instincts are nurtured by the outskirts.

If animal impulses are tied to creative breakthroughs, how should we interpret the tortured hallucinations of Camille that drive Laurent and Thérèse to suicide? The failure of the beastly lovers to ward off the bourgeois individual's spectre indicates the impossibility of escaping the confines of the metropolis. The novel concludes with two dead bodies slumped under Madame Raquin's paralyzed gaze: 'les cadavres restèrent toute la nuit sur le carreau de la salle à manger, tordus, vautrés, éclairés de lueurs jaunâtres par les clartés de la lampe que l'abat-jour jetait sur eux [the two bodies remained on the dining room floor all night long, twisted and slumped in death, lit by the flickering yellow glow of the shaded lamp]' (*Z* 285; *R* 205). The play of colours illuminates the cold reality of the physical body stripped of its humanity.

Given that we encounter such a grim view of the human condition in the environs of Paris, can *Thérèse Raquin* be considered within the discipline of animal studies? Moments of pastoral fantasy are fleeting, and tinged with violence; the characters briefly escape the stifling metropolis to commit murder in the neighbouring suburbs. Anne Simon observes that the French do not share the North-American tradition of environmental literature, marked by wide-open

35 Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 152.

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spaces.[36] As the novel is primarily confined to the city and its outskirts, Zola's vision of nature seems to be an aesthetic construction. *Thérèse Raquin* does not cast animal instincts in a positive light – they are reduced to bestial lust or bloodthirsty wrath. These ferocious impulses, these examples of 'sensation' are, however, a visceral revolt against societal oppression that manifests itself in a groundbreaking aesthetic. Zola's penchant for rage and disgust can be seen as an essential component of nineteenth-century avant-garde art that resonates in the present day.

Today, along the banks of the murky Seine, Parisians bask in the sun, as pieces of rubbish float past them: bottles and cigarettes fuse in piles of brown slime, under which swim fish that are sick and inconsumable due to poisoning. The forests along the river in Saint-Ouen, the site of Camille's murder, are surrounded by high-rise buildings.[37] Perhaps the true enemy, and murderer of so many forms of life, is the false notion that we are distinct from our environment, and separated from the world of animals.

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