

# On the Possible Link between Phenomenology and Naturalism in Octave Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des Supplices* (1899) and Émile Zola's *Vérité* (1903)

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## RÉSUMÉ

*Cette étude propose l'existence d'un lien entre le naturalisme et la phénoménologie de Husserl – au sens d'expériences vécues et de leur construction dans l'esprit – dans Le Jardin des Supplices d'Octave Mirbeau et Vérité de Zola. Nous avons choisi d'utiliser la théorie de Jean Petitot et Francisco Varela aux fins d'établir un rapport entre l'état mental du narrateur dans chacun des deux romans et le monde des sciences cognitives. Nous ne discuterons, dans les limites de cet essai, que deux des "idées" se rapportant à la théorie husserlienne: la conscience intentionnelle et l'intuition originaire. Comme la phénoménologie qui, en tant que science de l'esprit, repose sur les descriptions de phénomènes se présentant à la conscience, le naturalisme repose lui aussi sur les expériences directes du monde naturel pour étudier les hommes puisqu'il dépend des perceptions et de l'observation, quoique celle-ci soit dérivée d'une méthode expérimentale de l'approche des phénomènes. L'on verra que dans une grande mesure, la conscience est l'élément principal permettant d'unir la phénoménologie et le naturalisme dans ces œuvres. Les textes montrent comment les auteurs représentent la nature humaine et la société en fonction de leurs perceptions et de leurs expériences vécues.*

In *Naturaliser la phénoménologie*, Jean Petitot and Francisco Varela agree with the original authors that a link could be made between naturalism and phenomenology. They determine to what extent phenomenology contributes to an understanding of natural phenomena when presented to the mind through perceived experiences. They also analyze the central problem of Husserl's theory by highlighting the need to "intégrer la phénoménologie husserlienne dans les sciences cognitives,"<sup>1</sup> or to combine the cognitive sciences with the study of the human mind. Whilst exploring Chomsky's naturalistic stance and his views on the creative aspect of language in relation to naturalism, Pierre Jacob explains that:

[W]hat a naturalistic enquiry into the mental should lead us to [...] is a "unification" of the cognitive science with the core natural sciences, not a reduction of the former to the latter. Perhaps unification will not occur until major changes affect the core natural sciences themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Petitot, Francisco J. Varela, Bernard Pachoud, and Jean-Michel Roy, "Comblent le déficit: introduction à la naturalisation de la phénoménologie," in *Naturaliser la phénoménologie: Essais sur la phénoménologie contemporaine et les sciences cognitives*, eds. Jean Petitot, Francisco J. Varela, Bernard Pachoud, and Jean-Michel Roy (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 2002) 1-100, 1-2. French version of the original work, *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1999) 1-80.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Jacob, "Chomsky, Cognitive Science, Naturalism and Internalism," 2002: 37. Web. 20 March 2018 < [www.researchgate.net/publication/36734966\\_Chomsky\\_Cognitive\\_Science\\_Naturalism\\_and\\_Internalism](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/36734966_Chomsky_Cognitive_Science_Naturalism_and_Internalism) >. Due to the limit on the number of words, it has not been possible to expand Jacob's analysis on Chomsky's naturalistic stance and his views about the mental world in relation to naturalism.

In his work on phenomenology, Mathew Ratcliffe stresses that Husserl and Heidegger do not believe that empirical science is privileged over all other forms of enquiry. He shows that “scientific accounts of things are oblivious to a ‘world’ that is presupposed by the intelligibility of science and thus exposes naturalism’s reliance on impoverished conceptions of human experiences.”<sup>3</sup>

Along with Petitot and Varela there has been a revived focus of interest in phenomenological awareness. Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi claim that:

[I]n the late 1980s [...], psychologists and philosophers started to talk about consciousness in the context of the cognitive sciences [...]. In other words, in some circles, phenomenology as a philosophical approach was thought to be of possible importance when consciousness was raised as a scientific question. [...] [W]hen methodological questions arose about how to study the experiential dimension scientifically, [...], a new discussion of phenomenology was started.<sup>4</sup>

Zahavi and Gallagher also point out that Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers, as well, an example of how phenomenology can play an important role in the cognitive sciences. They argue that:

[For Merleau-Ponty] the whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression.”<sup>5</sup>

However, for the French philosopher, there is a dichotomy between “object/subject in consciousness; in other words, that which is seen is the object and that which looks, or does the perceiving, is the subject.”<sup>6</sup> Although Merleau-Ponty highlights this dichotomy, I intend to show in this paper that subject and object can be combined, on the basis of the link to be established between phenomenology and naturalism, in that the object(s) of perception affect(s) the subject’s consciousness; as a result, object and subject merge in a work of art by means of a relationship between the narrator’s mind and *his* outside world.

If phenomenology functions as the science of the mind and relies on descriptions of phenomena as they are given to consciousness, conversely, naturalism also depends on conscious experiences to gain a perspective on the human condition; but it bases its observations on an experimental method derived from “unbiased” perceptions of given phenomena. Zahavi and Gallagher highlight an important point about Husserl’s thoughts on phenomenology; they argue that for Husserl, “phenomenology should base its considerations on the way things are experienced.”<sup>7</sup> In a similar way to phenomenology, naturalism takes as its starting point the way things are experienced, since naturalist texts document what is observed and studied. In this paper, I examine how an empirical approach to mind similarly has as the focus of its study a natural phenomenon, since, at the heart of this method lies the concept of consciousness and sensorial perception (which the subject experiences) based, albeit, on immanent and transcendental intuitions related to the object(s) perceived.

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<sup>3</sup> See Mathew Ratcliffe, “Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Naturalism and the Sense of Reality,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, Phenomenology and Naturalism* 72 (2013): 67-88.

<sup>4</sup> Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2012) 5.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* 5.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Preface, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996) 8.

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty 6.

Consciousness is thus the essential component linking phenomenology and naturalism; without it our ability to perceive, to observe, to feel and to be endowed with intuitions and with knowledge of our environment would not exist. Paradoxically, Zola's views on naturalism, as reflecting "un état d'esprit," strengthen Petitot and Varela's argument – as well as mine – that a link between the mental world and the cognitive one exists, since the latter is also governed by what the mind feels and experiences when an occurrence presents itself to consciousness.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the observation of an "occurrence," the perception of the phenomenon becomes then a study of the natural world in that, through it, we are constantly liaising with entities which exist in our physical environment, whether rural or urban.

Since the crucial feature of mental representation is consciousness, it could be argued that perception and intentionality belong to the domain of the cognitive sciences in both *Le Jardin des Supplices* (1899) and *Vérité* (1903), as what is perceived about human behaviour, or what appears to be in the narrator's consciousness at the time of his lived experiences within society. These perceptions are (intentionally) investigated, accurately documented and represented (on paper through writing) as a natural phenomenon, since for both narrators, mankind is predestined to greed and cruelty.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Petitot and Varela underline that, "[...] la nature de la conscience, l'importance de l'intentionnalité comme marque des états mentaux [...], [et] [u]ne théorie satisfaisante de la cognition doi[vent] rendre compte de la phénoménalité, c'est-à-dire, [...] pour l'homme notamment, les choses ont des apparences."<sup>10</sup>

Consciousness and perception function as key words here, emphasizing our basic argument and thus strengthening the probable relationship between phenomenology and naturalism. What results from the narrators' direct experiences of their socio-political world and its institutions is intentionally reproduced or transformed into narrative as a vivid mental image. In fact, perceived experiences are related to the narrator's investigative methods and empirical observations of the outside world, indicating that a methodological dualism is at play in *Le Jardin des Supplices* and *Vérité*. The subjects' inner perceptions and their external representations of those perceptions become the substance of the works by Mirbeau and Zola. In both novels, a linearity can be traced between the narrators' mental world and their physical one, because the narratives provide a "documented" account of human nature filtered through the narrators' consciousness and based on their experiences with contemporaries.

Accordingly, phenomenology and scientific naturalism can be seen as "[des] théorie[s] descriptive[s] de l'essence des purs vécus, [des] théorie[s] de connaissances dotées d'un domaine d'investigation en même temps que d'une forme épistémologique spécifique."<sup>11</sup> This viewpoint is important for our analysis in that Zola's naturalistic doctrines are, arguably, not far from Husserl's. They are also based on perception, intention, knowledge, observation and on real experiences, as methods of investigation; Zola's *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876), *La Débâcle* (1892), and *Vérité* (1903) are examples, amongst others, of events the writer experienced, and which he expressed in prose through his perceptions, his objective observations and his empirical knowledge of those events.<sup>12</sup>

Pierre Michel explains how Mirbeau distanced himself from Zola's "prétention scientifique" and naturalism:

<sup>8</sup> See Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1890).

<sup>9</sup> Octave Mirbeau, *Le Jardin des Supplices*, ed. Michel Delon, 2nd edition (Paris: Gallimard, [1899] 1991). Émile Zola, *Vérité* [1903] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993). All references to the novels are to these editions, thereafter abbreviated as *JS* and *V* and indicated parenthetically with page numbers.

<sup>10</sup> Petitot et al. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Petitot et al. 32. My emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> In *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*, Zola evokes the hypocrisy of the Empire, in *La Débâcle*, the 1870 war with Prussia and its devastating effect on France and in *Vérité*, the Dreyfus Affair. See Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, eds. Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1960-1967).

[L]e naturalisme en tant qu'école lui fait horreur. Dans l'un de ses articles sur Gauguin, précisément, il y voit "la suppression de l'art" et la "négation de la poésie": C'est une "doctrine absurde et barbare," [...] Enfin, il juge dérisoire la prétention scientifique de Zola, qui s'imagine naïvement que le monde est intelligible, que la science peut en dissiper tous les mystères [...].<sup>13</sup>

Instead, Mirbeau insisted on the subjectivity of art, claiming that "[l]'œuvre d'art est personnelle et subjective et reflète le tempérament de l'artiste, sa vision unique des choses, reconnaissable entre toutes."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, he reflected on his perceptions and intuitions regarding his contemporaries by "reporting" his "essence des purs vécus"<sup>15</sup> to his readers, based on his observations, his experiences and his intuitions about human nature.

In that phenomenology functions as knowledge derived from experience and perception, it resembles naturalism. Phenomenology is arguably connected to the science of exploring human consciousness by analyzing its ontological component and documenting its findings through an investigation of "milieu, race [and] moment," as Zola explains when outlining his naturalist methods in *Le Roman expérimental* (1880). For example, environment is a natural phenomenon for the novelist since it is determined by laws of physics, or by natural laws that are immanent and transcendental. Through this deterministic view of the world, the naturalist method provides an explanation for what a phenomenon entails; and, indeed, phenomenology deals with the analysis of human nature inhabiting a space of meaning, the psyche and the universe. As argued, the common factor is human consciousness, and therefore also intention and sensorial perception. These latter two can be joined by means of an epistemological tool: the theory of human knowledge and direct experience. Having addressed the probable link between phenomenology and naturalism, we now turn to a discussion of how Mirbeau's *Le Jardin des supplices* and Zola's *Vérité* illustrate this connection.

For these writers, human nature is a phenomenon, both cruel and kind. For Mirbeau especially, the human being is represented as "un rejeton monstrueux des noces de la nature et de la culture" and is composed of "le détrit de préjugés ataviques que l'évolution de ses ancêtres a laissé dans les formes de son cerveau."<sup>16</sup> Mirbeau's novels *Le Calvaire* (1886), *L'Abbé Jules* (1888), *Sébastien Roch* (1890) and *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1900) highlight this problem. The characters in these novels are represented as hypocritical and selfish (*L'Abbé Jules* and *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*), yet insecure (*Le Calvaire* and *Sébastien Roch*), since they live in a prejudiced, egotistical and biased world.

Mirbeau plays on the absurdity and brutality of mankind and of governments in *Le Jardin des Supplices*. Society and characters are Mirbeau's surrogate victims, in other words, the novelist conspires with his enemies to satisfy his revulsion at such a hypocritical world. The texts highlight problems related to the phenomenon of mankind and his lived experiences. Mirbeau compares, for example, the blood of the victims that seeps into the garden to corruption; victims are sacrificed for the sake of political and social power. The novelist exploits transgressions in nature to highlight the disintegration of society. In *Le Jardin des supplices*, he parallels the sinister with the grotesque; the horrible and the beautiful become one: "le sang et la mort des suppliciés permettent l'éclosion des fleurs les plus prodigieuses et les plus

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Michel, "Mirbeau et le symbolisme," *Cahiers Octave Mirbeau* 2 (1995): 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Michel, "Mirbeau et le symbolisme" 10. Mirbeau "reprend contre les naturalistes l'accusation de 'myopie' lancée jadis par Baudelaire contre le réalisme. Il leur reproche de cultiver le détail [...] et de s'arrêter à l'apparence superficielle des êtres et des choses, au lieu de chercher à en révéler 'l'âme'." Michel, "Mirbeau et le symbolisme" 9-10. See also *Les Cahiers naturalistes* 64 (1990); and *Les Cahiers Octave Mirbeau* 1 (1994).

<sup>15</sup> Petitot et al 32.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Michel, *Les Combats d'Octave Mirbeau*, Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995) 68.

envoûtantes” (*JS* 181). By providing the names of flowers on labels, Mirbeau reproaches the corruption of certain politicians and their “political opinions”: “Il n’est point rare de rencontrer dans nos parterres un iris, par exemple, baptisé *Le Général Archinard!* Il est des narcisses – des narcisses! – qui se dénomment grotesquement: *Le Triomphe du Président Félix Faure;* des roses trémières qui [...] acceptent l’appellation ridicule de: *Deuil de Monsieur Thiers* [...]” (*JS* 182, my emphasis). In *Contes Cruels*, Octave Mirbeau draws attention to this juxtaposition of transgressive nature and corrupted institutions:

C’est la nature qui, par moi, proteste contre la faiblesse, et, par conséquent, contre l’inutilité criminelle des êtres impuissants à se développer sous le soleil! [...]. Et non seulement la nature me pousse à agir ainsi, mais la société me l’ordonne. Je ne suis que l’instrument de ces deux puissances contraires et unies en un lien sacré: la haine mondiale du pauvre.”<sup>17</sup>

Normally, the law against killing regulates the relationships between individuals, and even more so among peoples, notes Isabelle Mellot. She points out that Mirbeau considers governments just as criminal as individuals:

[L]a société offre à travers l’armée, [...] un exutoire commode aux pulsions destructrices inhérentes à l’être humain, qu’elle encourage en valorisant la bravoure guerrière au nom de la patrie. C’est ce que tend à démontrer le narrateur de “L’école de l’assassinat,” qui fait du meurtre une “fonction sociale” au sein du “vaste abattoir qui s’appelle l’humanité.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet naturalism surpasses the author’s intuitions and perceptions by means of its empirical and investigative methods for the study of human nature.

For Mirbeau human behaviour is a phenomenon, yet it represents a rational explanation of the world in which he lives. In *Le Jardin des Supplices*, the narrator’s account of his lived experiences in the “Frontispiece” is one example which underscores that fact (*JS* 42-62). In that passage, the narrator’s lived experiences – those that he perceived and that affected him during his travels – emphasize the link between phenomenology and naturalism since he “documents” them to his fellow scientists in an empirical manner; in a detached way, the scientists discuss the right to murder which they had previously investigated, studied and documented in their work and presented as “un instinct vital qui est en nous... comme l’instinct génésique, [...] puisque le meurtre est la base même de nos institutions sociales, par conséquent la nécessité la plus impérieuse de la vie civilisée...” (*JS* 44). Although Mirbeau makes a mockery of the scientists’ discussion about nature and the right to murder, this satirical passage gives an account of the narrator’s “lived experiences,” through a description of and commentary on his travels, and introduces the argument proposed: “Aujourd’hui le progrès étant venu, il est loisible à tout honnête homme de se procurer, pour deux sous, l’émotion délicate et civilisatrice de l’assassinat...” (*JS* 48). In this passage, Mirbeau highlights the narrator’s complicity with those institutions and his double-standard. The satire against institutions and man’s cruel nature is further emphasized when the narrator, whilst commenting on the nature of war, insists that it is a joy to kill: “Quelle joie quand la balle décapite ces semblants d’hommes!... Chacun s’excite, s’acharne, s’encourage... On n’entend que des mots de destruction et de

<sup>17</sup> Octave Mirbeau, *Contes Cruels* (Paris: Archimbaud, 2009) 512.

<sup>18</sup> Isabelle Mellot, “Antinaturalisme et Antiphysis dans le conte cruel fin-de-siècle chez Octave Mirbeau et Villiers de l’Isle-Adam”, *Mémoire de Master 2, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon*, 2015, 142. Web. 20 March 2018 < <https://www.scribd.com/doc/304616189/Isabelle-Mellot-Antinaturalisme-et-antiphysis-dans-le-conte-cruel-fin-de-siecle-chez-Octave-Mirbeau-et-Villiers-de-l-Isle-Adam> >.

mort...” (JS 48). Before an audience composed of scientists, the narrator of *Le Jardin*'s frontispiece recounts his “subjective” experiences in an attempt to analyze human nature, albeit as a pastiche.

The narrator's perceptions of human nature are based on intuitions, although he is part of that hypocritical environment, since he undertakes his mission under an assumed title, that of an embryologist, with the help of his friend Eugène Mortain. Indeed, he is as corrupt as Mortain, who, for fear of being found out about his inside deals and thus expelled from his post in parliament, sends the narrator on his travels as a means of silencing him: “Toi-même [...] tu crois pouvoir disposer de moi par la terreur... me faire chanter, enfin comme un banquier véreux!...” (JS 94). This strategy is revealed when the narrator refers to his friend's hypocrisy:

Eugène Mortain avait passé par tous les métiers – même les plus bas – par le dessous – même les plus ténébreux [...]. Dévoré de besoins immédiats et d'appétits ruineux, il ne se faisait pas alors un chantage important ou une malpropre affaire que notre brave Eugène n'en fut, en quelque sorte, l'âme mystérieuse et violente. (JS 80)

In these diatribes, we see how perceptual experiences provide the narrator with a “realistic” representation of events and facts which he has encountered and represented through his investigative method, albeit in a cynical tone.<sup>19</sup> According to Mirbeau, man's cruel nature is inborn, it is part of his genetic make-up. Zola's explanation of naturalism (when related to lived experiences) fits well with Mirbeau's novel, since *Le Jardin des Supplices* acts as the “continuelle compilation des documents humains, c'est l'humanité vue et peinte, résumée en des créations réelles et éternelles.”<sup>20</sup>

For Mirbeau, man is blind to the call for help and delights in wars and colonialism. If human nature is a phenomenon, the novelist's duty is to investigate it, document it, and present it to his readers as “naturally” alien, composed of cruel and egotistical characteristics. This argument is further supported in *Le Jardin des Supplices*, when Clara takes the narrator into the garden and shows him the prisoners being tortured. In this passage Mirbeau links his experience of society's heinous crimes, his perceptions of the human condition, and the natural beauty of the garden. The narrator's perspective on this experience is revealed to the reader as an immanent one, creating thus a phenomenon in which the instruments and behaviour of the torturer, the cries of the victims and the ecstasy of Clara are documented with precision.

The novelist's immanent intuitions about the natural world and human nature are transposed into narrative form based on observation and his experience of such a world. His “lived experiences” are voiced by Clara, his spokeswoman; embedded in her discourse is a “dialogue” with the narrator, in which she displays her “knowledge” of the garden and reveals her sadomasochistic desires. Indeed, Clara's distinctive mental traits have two functions in the narratives. Her role as a character is to highlight what the narrator perceives from his experiences: authoritarian hypocrisy, society's cruelty, his resentment of the present Republic, its institutions and dictates. Through her “speech” and perceptions about the right to murder, Mirbeau also emphasizes the sadomasochistic and greedy nature of the human race. Clara's eagerness to visit the garden and experience the ways the victims are tortured gratifies her,

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<sup>19</sup> It is accepted that *Le Jardin des Supplices* and *Vérité* are novels created out of the authors' lived experiences. The first is an account of the socio-political events which occurred during Mirbeau's time, and the second is also a veiled account of the Dreyfus Affair, which Zola not only experienced, but also studied carefully, reacting vehemently against its racial injustices. See footnote 28.

<sup>20</sup> Émile Zola, “Le naturalisme au théâtre ” in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 9 (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1968) 388.

yet her obsession objectifies Mirbeau's views about his world.<sup>21</sup> By necessity, her role enables his readers to recognize the extent of the stain on human nature. Through her, Mirbeau brings the blood of the innocents into the narrative and highlights thus the human plight. Clara's delight in seeing or hearing the cries of the victims accentuates the narrator's emotional reaction in the context of his perceptions and intuitions about human nature. This dialogue is recorded when Clara and the narrator have entered the garden and hear the bell heralding the torture of the prisoners:

- Pourquoi cette cloche?... D'où vient cette cloche?... questionnai-je.
- Comment?... Tu ne sais pas?... Mais c'est la cloche du Jardin des Supplices!... Figure-toi... On ligote un patient... et on le dépose sous la cloche... Et l'on sonne à toute volée jusqu'à ce que les vibrations l'aient tué!
- Vois mon amour, comme les Chinois sont de merveilleux artistes et comme ils savent rendre la nature complice de leurs raffinements de cruauté! (*JS* 180, 188)

In this novel, Mirbeau depicts man's intrinsic nature whilst cataloguing his propensity to belligerence, war, colonialism, anti-Semitism and the right to murder.<sup>22</sup> For him, nature has a binary role, simultaneously good and bad because nature, in this novel, is an accomplice in the methods of torture used by the Chinese, since it has a propensity to be cruel as the plants need the blood of the victims to create "une terre plus riche en humus naturel" (*JS* 181). Most certainly, the plants need human blood to survive, as Clara points out to the narrator whilst she explains that torture is happening everywhere in the world: "et je tâche de m'en accommoder et de m'en réjouir, car le sang est un précieux adjuvant de la volupté... C'est le vin de l'amour" (*JS* 189). The blood of the victims turns the garden into a paradise, erotic in nature, since it is a source of food for the garden and the plants, as the words "sang," "volupté," and "amour" suggest. In the following passage, Mirbeau compares the voracious plants in the garden to the greed and cruelty of institutions and human nature. Indeed, as the victims' blood functions as fertilizer, likewise the need for war and for murder act as fulfilment to satisfy depraved human desires:

Mélangés [les corps des victimes torturées] au sol, comme un fumier – car on les enfouissait sur place – les morts l'engraissèrent [le jardin] de leur décomposition lente, et pourtant, nulle part, même au cœur des plus fantastiques forêts tropicales, il n'existait une terre plus riche en humus naturel. (*JS* 181)

The garden needs the blood or the decomposing bodies to flourish; its "végétation [...] s'active ... des ordures des prisonniers, du sang des suppliciés [...], les cadavres quotidiens [...] forment un puissant compost dont les plantes sont voraces et qui les rend plus vigoureuses et plus belles" (*JS* 181). A parallel can be drawn between Clara's erotic and sadomasochistic needs and the vegetation's required nourishment in the garden. Arguably, both nature and Clara receive gratification from the blood and the decomposition of the victims' bodies, as the verb "s'active" and the adjectives "voraces" and "vigoureuses" suggest, implying that the garden, like Clara, enjoys an "orgasm" when the victims are sacrificed. Mirbeau connects man's heinous crimes and lies to the cycle of life in the garden through his observations and

<sup>21</sup> Clara's "Eros and Thanatos" need further discussion and analysis. However, Robert Zeigler addresses this important point in the novel in his work on Mirbeau: *The Nothing Machine: The Fiction of Octave Mirbeau* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Cesare Lombroso's theory of anthropological criminology essentially stated that criminality was inherited. See Cesare Lombroso, *Crime, its Causes and Remedies* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

immanent intuitions about its nature. Cruelty in Mirbeau's work is fundamentally subversive, but is also a phenomenon which nature does not fail to extend to the human species.

For both Mirbeau and Zola, knowledge about society is based on observation and experience since they rely on intuition to portray a decadent century inhabited by greed, degenerating into lawlessness, and ruled by despots. Just as Mirbeau uses Clara as his spokeswoman, Zola's perceptions of human nature and his methods of investigation in *Vérité* are also voiced through a narrator, Marc in this case, whose task is to find the perpetrator of a rape and murder. His investigation is conducted primarily according to his theory of knowledge, which involves collecting data and facts about the murder and basing his observations on his contemporaries' behaviour when Simon is accused of the rape and murder of Zéphirin. Zola shows that Simon is the accused because he is a Jew. The story of the murder and rape of Zéphirin is an allegory of the Dreyfus Affair; by transposing the political events of the Affair, Zola manifests an abhorrence of anti-Semitism and highlights his views or perception about a corrupt society. He emphasizes the notion of truth related to a crime perpetrated on innocents – Simon and Zéphirin, or Dreyfus in real life – and denounces it as anti-Semitic and shameful. Thierry Pacquot argues that this novel is a “roman de la honte et pas seulement du désir de justice.”<sup>23</sup> Zola embodies this notion in the Maillebois society's insular and racist residents, resistant to secular teaching. He further underlines their hypocritical and narrow-minded anti-Semitic feelings – a timely reproach during the years of the Affair, since rampant xenophobia targeted Jews in particular. According to Christopher Forth and Elinor Accampo, the Dreyfus Affair was the “most divisive ‘event’ of the period that had been, for decades, the preserve of the conventional political and social historians.”<sup>24</sup> In this novel, Zola uses his character Simon as the victim of anti-Semitism to express, as well, his anti-clerical feelings against the Catholic Church's insularity and hypocrisy in wishing to suppress his novel *Vérité*. When the crime against Zéphirin is discovered, Marc becomes aware that Simon the Jew has been unjustly blamed: “Marc ne put dormir. Il était hanté par les événements de la veille, ce crime monstrueux, mystérieux, dont la redoutable énigme se posait à son intelligence” (*V* 42). Marc experiences and witnesses the hypocrisy and cruelty of his fellow-beings towards Simon: “C'était l'accusation du meurtre rituel qui reparaissait, cette hantise de la foule, venue de si loin à travers les siècles, toujours renaissante au premier désastre” (*V* 52). The examples, which bring out the connection between Marc's mental world and the physical one he perceives are found in the narrow-minded attitudes of Maillebois society when the townspeople form an angry mob to accuse Simon of the crime. Marc's perception of the event that unfolds in front of him is reported by the narrator as follows:

Aussi cette foule, nourrie des contes du “Petit Beaumontais,” encore secouée par l'horreur du crime, poussa-t-elle des cris, [...]. C'était la légende désormais indestructible, volant de bouche en bouche, affolant la cohue grondante et menaçante. “À mort, à mort, l'assassin, le sacrilège!... À mort, à mort le juif!” (*V* 86)

This sense of a crowd gone mad for the blood of the perpetrator is furthermore strengthened when Marc comes face to face with Gorgias, Zéphirin's rapist and murderer. Marc's convictions about Gorgias's crime and his perceptions and intuitions about the cruelty of human nature are further heightened in this passage as Marc's mental state and his physical world merge. In other words,

<sup>23</sup> Thierry Pacquot, Préface, in Émile Zola, *Vérité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, [1903] 1993). Web. 16 March, 2018 <<http://books.couver.ru/#t=Ve%CC%81rite%CC%81+E%CC%81mile+Zola+%3B+pre%CC%81face+de+Thierry+Paquot.+E%CC%81mile+Zola+%3B+pre%CC%81face+de+Thierry+Paquot>>.

<sup>24</sup> *Confronting Modernity in the Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Mind and Gender*, eds. Christopher Forth and Elinor Accampo (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 60.

Marc's conscious state when Gorgias is explaining how he raped and murdered Zéphirin is connected in his mind with his earlier intuitions and investigative methods of finding the criminal: "Marc gardait une certitude, un malaise. [...], cela était si confus, que Marc, après en avoir eu comme une *intuition* rapide, était retombé aux ténèbres" (V 24, my emphasis). And later, "Marc [...] se désespérait d'avoir mené ses recherches au milieu d'une telle obscurité [...]" (V 127). In his role as narrator, Marc reconstructs the details of Zéphirin's murder primarily by adhering to his investigative methods and, secondarily, by facing the subject of his *traumatic* and lived experiences.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Marc is perplexed as to how his investigative methods were born out of his perceptions and intuitions regarding the murder. It becomes clear how the "methodological dualism" which is the point of this paper functions in this passage and appears to have merged Marc's "état d'esprit" with his protagonist's methods of investigation. Marc, who is "*éperdu de voir enfin la vérité se dresser ainsi, après tant de visions mensongères, revivait la scène qu'il avait déjà reconstituée*" (V 701, my emphasis) when Gorgias expiates his crime in the presence of Maillebois residents. Zola catalogues man's hypocritical and cruel nature as a phenomenon through Marc's innate intuitions and perceptions about the nature of his society, which he documents following experimental methods of observation. Through Marc, Zola shows how this aberrant human behaviour can be perceived, analyzed and explained; yet such behaviour affects others, in this case Simon's family, as well as Geneviève, Marc's wife. For Zola, this negative dynamic is intentional and lies at the core of human nature. When a psyche becomes infected, despicable behaviour can spread like a disease throughout society.

Regarding the connection between phenomenology and naturalism, the word "reconstituée" is fundamental in that it emphasizes Marc's mental state, in the context of his lived experiences in Maillebois society. Certainly, through a combination of remembered events and investigative methods (the rape and murder of a child), *Vérité* strengthens the link between the mental and the physical world, or between phenomenology and the cognitive sciences. The proposed hypothesis of a link between phenomenology and naturalism in those novels is conceivable.

By means of their conscious perspectives on their fellow beings, both writers highlight man as subservient to society's norms and rules and depict him simultaneously as a phenomenon of nature, one that has been genetically "manufactured," with cruel, debased, and atavistic characteristics. As rebellious, and/or anarchist novelists, disgusted by their century's hypocrisy and cruelty, Mirbeau and Zola viewed society as materialistic, marked by a lack of human sentiment. In both novels, the authors anticipated and represented mankind and society by portraying human nature according to their perceptions and their direct experiences with the outside world, and by following up on their empirical observations about society.

Mirbeau's and Zola's perceptions and their lived experiences provided them with immanent intuitions related to their observations about human nature. As an answer to this problem, Mirbeau "destroyed" the world in which his characters lived with the objective of building a new one. In his novels, he gave substance to his views of a new world as did Dr. Frankenstein when creating the monster,<sup>26</sup> by means of chaotic and ominous representations of such a world:

[O]ù que l'on aille et quoi que l'on voie, on ne se heurte jamais qu'à des désordres et à de la folie.

Pour vivre, pour créer, ne faut-il pas détruire? N'est-ce pas dans la décomposition, dans la pourriture, que la vie fait son nid et dépose ses germes?<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See my work on *Vérité*, "The Return of the Repressed, Uncovering Family Secrets in Zola's Fiction: An Interpretation of Selected Novels," *French Studies* 35 (2016): 279-88.

<sup>26</sup> See Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, [1818] 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Mirbeau, *Contes Cruels* 535.

Zola, on the other hand, attempted to re-create a moral and noble world with *Justice*, his utopian novel and the fourth instalment to conclude the series *Les Quatre Évangiles* (1900-1901), which he did not finish owing to his early death.

Mirbeau and Zola denounce a civilization that adopts violence in order to survive and rule. Both novelists discredit institutions by sketching out, as well as documenting, a hypocritical society with dysfunctional governments. The authorial perspective on their characters is determined by what they perceive of humanity; they position their characters in their physical world and represent them as individuals formed by their societal environment, considering it as a natural phenomenon to be investigated and documented. Their perceptions are based on an intuitive knowledge about mankind acquired through their own experiences, but processed via experimental and empirical models of observation.

In *Le Jardin des Supplices* and in *Vérité*, Mirbeau and Zola have demonstrated that society is deregulated and dysfunctional. For Mirbeau, human nature is: “le rejeton monstrueux des noces de la nature et de la culture.” Without the novelists’ direct experiences and their immanent intuitions and instincts identifying human nature as corrupt, they would not have written such powerful novels since the novels’ imagery and the “artificial” co-exist within their narrators’ minds, allowing them to document humanity in its lowest and debased form and accusing it of double-standards.<sup>28</sup> Conscious of such a dysfunctional society, they have reproduced it as it presented itself to them. Indeed, these authors have shown the close connection between society and nature, which are both depicted in their novels as cruel, as our studies have demonstrated.

To a large extent, therefore, we can link the mental science of phenomenology with scientific naturalism in these novels. A relationship between phenomenology and naturalism in Mirbeau’s and Zola’s work can be established since the writers have investigated, by means of their empirical knowledge, the problem of human nature and “reported” it through fictional writing based, however, on their intuitions and perceptions of a brutal and violent race.

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<sup>28</sup> See Zola’s inflammatory letter to President Félix Faure “J’accuse!...” published in *L’Aurore* on the 13th of January 1898, as well as *La Vérité en marche* (Paris: Charpentier, 1901).