1994

Zola's Nana | Power in a prostitute's body

Sonja M. Olson

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature **

Yes, I grant permission  
No, I do not grant permission  

Author's Signature ____________

Date: ____________

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.
COLA'S NANA: POWER IN A PROSTITUTE'S BODY

by

Sonja M. Olson
B.A. Colorado State University, 1988

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Masters in Arts
The University of Montana
1994

Approved by:

[Signature]
Chairperson

[Signature]
Dean, Graduate School

Date: July 20, 1994
Zola’s *Nana*, Power in a Prostitute’s Body

Director: Pascale Krumm

The Naturalist author, Emile Zola, of the late nineteenth century tried to recreate literature while utilizing scientific theories. This thesis will show first how these theories relate to *Nana*, written in 1880 as the ninth novel of twenty in the Rougon-Macquart series. While trying to "demythify" the novel by denying all forces of religion and metaphysics, Zola incorporated the ideas behind Nana’s biological body and her proletarian social environment. This thesis will evaluate whether or not he was successful.

In the second chapter the power exercised by Nana is analyzed so that one can understand how her feminine force, in the form of her sexuality and her body, originated its control. After discussing who a nineteenth-century woman was in comparison to Nana, one comprehends the many reasons for the battlefield of power created in Nana’s life. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian, was able to help in the understanding and analysis of Nana’s reason for harnessing the power that surrounded her. Through discussions of regulation of societal norms by law, perversions, self-knowledge, and domination, one is able to define who Nana was and how she worked.

Thirdly, this paper will enter into Nana’s world of prostitution – once again noting Zola’s biological writing of the body, and the importance of the environment from which Nana comes, heredity, and in which she lives. Being able to better understand the power behind this complex woman as a prostitute/courtesan enabled a discussion of the imagery Zola used to portray Nana, from a machine to an animal to a goddess. However, in Zola’s attempt at a scientific display of fiction, he became entranced by the power surrounding Nana, whom he himself, created, and her mythical, inhuman characteristics as a prostitute, mother, and myth.
Table of Contents

Introduction..............................................................1

Chapter One: Naturalism, Emile Zola, and the Novel Nana...5

Chapter Two: Power in Nana............................................29

Chapter Three: The Woman, Nana: Prostitute, Mother, and Myth...................................................56

Conclusion........................................................................96

Bibliography.................................................................99
Introduction

The Naturalist author, Émile Zola, of the late nineteenth century tried to recreate literature while utilizing scientific theories. Incorporating Claude Bernard's theories in *Introduction to the Studies of Experimental Medicine*, Zola reevaluated literary theories. Zola described his notions in *The Experimental Novel*, written in 1860, the same year as he wrote *Nana*. By incorporating these ideas in his own novels, he tried to "demythify" the novel, denying all forces of religion and metaphysics, and employing studies in biology and social environment. This thesis will show how it is questionable if he was able to succeed in his goal, especially in *Nana*, the ninth novel of twenty in his Rougon/Macquart twenty novel series.

After exploring Zola's personal life and the goals of his style of naturalist writing, this thesis focuses on *Nana*’s Zolien traits. Entering into Nana’s world of prostitution, the reader notes the biological writing of the body, and the importance of the environment in which Nana lives. Not only a prostitute, but also a courtesan, both of which this paper will define and evaluate. Nana was able to move between social environments and classes. This mobile ability easily portrayed in *Nana* enabled Zola to analyse many class structures in the novel. These different structures, such as the aristocracy and the proletariat,
will be introduced and intertwined into this thesis. When writing of Nana's characteristics, physical and emotional, Zola employs many "unliterary" terms, such as "digestion" and "sex." These terms give Nana an almost scientific feel, which will be explored in detail, but Zola does not completely escape the romantic imagery and power of the character he has created.

The power of Nana is a crucial analysis if one is to understand how her feminine force generates its control. After discussing who a nineteenth-century woman was in comparison to Nana, this paper will show how one can comprehend the many aspects of power entailed in Nana's life. Necessarily defining the two areas of power translated from "pouvoir" and "puissance," places one in the position of being able to question and identify what power means in Nana. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian, was able to help in the understanding and analysis of Nana's reason for obtaining power, and the usage of it. Through Foucauldian discussions of regulation of societal norms by law, perversions, self-knowledge, and domination, one is able to further express the fashion of Nana's exercising of her power, and how she was able to manipulate the people that surrounded her in her self-created courtesan world.

An understanding of the power behind this complex woman as a courtesan has enabled a relevant evaluation of who this
character was in the world of nineteenth-century women. While looking at the name given to the character, and who she was within her "self," one considers the various different parts that Nana seems to play. While first analyzing Nana as the picturesque _femme fatale_ according to Mario Praz's definition in *The Romantic Aeon*, one compares Nana's various traits to the pure woman ideal of the era. Recognizing her as a threat to the ricas woman, created by patriarchy as a model woman citizen, it becomes clear that this woman must remain outside the social norm so that order may remain intact. Thus, death being her only possible fate in Zola's eyes. It is important to note at this point that when speaking of the patriarchy in this paper, the author requests the reader to think of this term as an entire social construct, not only the male population.

While recognizing Nana's _femme fatale_ title, picturing her as a perversion and a threat to society, this motherly figure seems to emerge from the pages, once again in the shape of Nana. At first not seeming to meld into the characterization previously noted, the reader becomes confused. However, after closer examination, one sees that Nana's son, Louiset, is merely a "toy" that takes Nana's pain away during her maternal crises, reflecting her desire to become a bourgeois - to be accepted by her society as an a pure, "virginal" woman.

However, whether she is a prostitute or a mother, she
maintains the imagery of everything inhuman, from a machine to an animal to a goddess. Upon careful evaluation of each of these comparisons used in the describing of Nana, this thesis questions the reason for Zola's need to objectify through non-human traits this character who seems all the more real because of the unveiling of the believable woman, contrary to the unimaginable traits associated with the cult of true womanhood. Although much of what Nana does is highly fictional, the reasons behind her actions seem almost normal for a woman who has been a victim of her nineteenth-century social environment. It seems that Zola created a character that was anything but human. In Zola's attempt at a scientific display of fiction, created in a real world setting, he became entranced by the power of Nana, his own creation, and her mythical, inhuman characteristics as a prostitute, mother, and myth.
Emile Zola. The Father of Naturalism

The founder of Naturalism, Emile Zola, opened the doors for its expansion throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Having moved to Paris and skipping university studies in 1859, Zola led a poor existence trying to live off his few published pieces. Louis Hachette gave him a position at his Librairie Hachette in 1862-1866, which introduced Zola into the world of publishing.

By 1881, Zola had finally succeeded as an author writing for The European Herald in St. Petersburg. He left Hachette, free to explore all the aspects of his literary ideas through his novels. "The novel was the actual battleground or the great workshop" for Zola and his exploration of new literary movement (Wellek. History of Modern Criticism. 20).

Throughout Zola's intense writing career (in which he published his twenty novel Rougon-Maquet series between 1881 and 1902) the aristocracy refused to acknowledge his great works due to their unsavory content. Zola's notoriety went unnoticed until his bold open letter, "J'Accuse," in which he indicted the War Office for hushing up the truth about the Dreyfus Affair. "He was prosecuted and sentenced to a year's imprisonment but escaped to England and returned
to France a popular hero, after Dreyfus's final vindication" (Gant, 5). Upon returning to France in 1899, Zola at last found himself on comfortable ground in France's literary establishment as the father of Naturalism.²

Although Balzac and Stendhal were his masters, and although Zola claimed that Balzac was the father of Naturalism, Zola himself is the founder of the movement (Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, 17). Because Zola did not like to be considered as the head of a school for fear of stagnation and his horror of authority, he refused to acknowledge his work as his own (Wellek, History of Modern Criticism, 20). To his readers, however, he was, and will continue to be, the founder of Naturalism.

The Naturalist triangle of Zola-Ibsen-Tolstoy (later to be Dostoyevski), placed Zola among the greatest writers of the century. Zola was seen as representing the novel, Ibsen-drama, and the Russians as the mediators (Chevral, 31). The French Naturalist movement was different from those of other countries, such as Germany and Russia, but still all three movements maintained the same concepts of nature and the "real."

Zola's scientific ideas were born from the medical doctrine of Claude Bernard in his Introduction to the Studies of Experimental Medicine. In The Experimental Novel, Zola transposed the scientific theories of Bernard into the literary realm. Zola thought that the methods of
observation and experimentation that had allowed advancements in experimental medicine could give a novelist an exact idea of what experimental literature could be. Zola felt that the naturalist novel was a real experiment that a novelist could perform on humans with the help of observation. Observation indicated man's possibilities, and experiment taught man's outcomes. The observations gave the facts and helped with character development, and the experiments set characters into the story line (Zola, The Experimental Novel, chapter I).

Zola defined his experimental novels through these hopes:

to possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the machinery of his intellectual and sensory manifestations, under the influences of heredity and environment. ... and then finally to exhibit man living in social conditions produced by himself, which he modifies daily, and in the heart of which he himself experiences a continual transformation (Zola, The Experimental Novel, 20-21).

He desired to understand humanity and society, as nature's subjects, to the point of being able to control its outcome. All of this stemmed from man's desire to conquer nature during the industrial age. Ideally, Zola thought he could accomplish the experimental novel by equating feelings with reason, which was in turn applied to experiment, "if feeling
must be guided by the light of reason. reason in its turn must be guided by experiment" (The Experimental Novel, 34).

Zola's style of writing was similar to the natural ebb and flow of life. He focused on cycles, like seasons, on uncontrollable rhythms, like weather patterns, and on the daily happenstance of life and death, denying any form of mythical or religious rite of destiny. Destiny was considered "unreal" or "unobtainable" in the natural world. Since one could not observe it or experiment on it, destiny was not accepted in Naturalist literary theory.

Zola reinforced his theory, relying only on the study of the biological and organic world and his views on heredity. "[Lal circulation du sang dans l'arbre de la généalogie" showed how everything that came from the family tree, flowed back into the family tree (Mitterand, 83). One sees this in Zola's The Fortune of the Rougons:

Marthe's case was still more curious: she was an equally exact portrait of Adélaide, although Pierre Rougon had none of his mother's features distinctly marked: the physical resemblance had, as it were, passed over Pierre, to reappear in his daughter (144). Zola also reiterated his belief in the hereditary system in his last novel, Doctor Pascal. Pascal was a physician who studied heredity and wholeheartedly believed in it. In the last phases of the novel, Pascal lay dying. His young lover and niece, Clotilde, was about to have their child.
Ending the cycle with the death of Pascal and the birth of his son, Zola reiterated his theories on heredity and the continuity of life. To Zola, as he expressed in Doctor Pascal:

the sole instrument of life was heredity, which made the world; so that if one could only understand it, master it and make it do one's bidding, one could remake the world at will (34).

Zola's theories were not always well-accepted. In his era many contemporaries did not like his work, and found his style rather tasteless and dull. One anonymous writer for the Boston Tribune wrote, "in all its (books on vice) prosaic, dull heartless, disgusting nakedness ... No man has ever made vice so unlovely, so sickening, as Zola has done" (Baguley, 43). Zola used details, some would say insignificant details (Baguley, 39), and repetition in his works to expound on the focus of experimentation. Many found this approach to be boring. For example, Baguley notes in Zola's work:

it is excessively preoccupied with peripheral detail, facts, description, documentation, failing to represent characters who convey social, as opposed to physiological or pathological significance (13).

Another critic, Ferdinand Brunetière in the Revue des deux mondes in 1880, expressed his dissatisfaction with Zola's base theory of experimentation:
Mr. Zola does not know what the term "to experiment" means, because if the novelist, or the poet, carries out an experiment, he can only do so on himself, not on others... this is enough to destroy the very basis of Mr. Zola's theory (Baguley, 34).

However, Baguley, as well as other critics could not help to note the beauty in his style as an art:

Zola's didactic art is narrative in nature, sending knowledge into orbit along all the vectors of the story: the document becomes fiction: the documentary notes disappear into the impeccable machinery or the plans. ... the man of science becomes the story-teller, fulfilling the dream of an age of pedagogy and fiction (150).

These essays by Brunetière, Baguley, and other sometimes anonymous writers, conclude that writing is an art and not a science, and that no amount of experimentation or scientific additives can change this reasoning. Art is a transformation of reality as words never quite replicate the real. Zola appeared to contradict himself in his attempt at using the scientific method to write a novel.

According to Wellek the scientific parallel with the art form of the novel serves two purposes: "it defends the treatment of any subject matter, however low or repulsive, and it wards off charges of immorality" (History of Modern Criticism, 16). Zola could play with all the forces of
nature, beautiful and ugly, in his writings. Science did not exclude the ugly. Also, because of his use of science, Zola could deny all accusations of immorality: nothing was immoral because all was true to life and nature in a scientist's world. Thus, science had free reign on all aspects of nature, the body and its innate sexual desires included, clearing a path for uncensored writings. Authors of the past entranced readers with the glorious myths of nature's splendor. Zola introduced a new form of literature, using science as the main determinant. However, Zola did like to focus on the "bad," or "unsavory," perhaps because of his enjoyment in jolting his readers.

Considered a controversial author, Zola was also impressive. His rhythmical writing could be considered orchestral with its repetitions that were like musical cadences, coinciding with the modulations of nature's music and its systematic approach to phraseology. Although he would close his eyes to much that transcended the flesh, he still tended to enchant his readers with his stories.

Naturalism as a Movement in the Nineteenth Century

Although the founder of the nineteenth century Naturalist movement in France, Zola was not the first to use the term "naturalism." Naturalism has had many different definitions in various countries. René Wellek points out in
A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950 that Montaigne's definition equated naturalism with materialism or secularism; Belinsky used the term in his 1847 "Survey of Russian Literature" in opposition of "rhetorism" (15). These two terms vary greatly and show how naturalism has been alive in the vocabulary of philosophers and writers for centuries. As Yves Chevral states in Le Naturalisme, "le naturalisme apparaît chaque fois qu'une époque artistique est révolue" (14). The coming of the nineteenth century in France and the growth of the Realist writers, brought a new wave of definitions and ideas to accompany the term. Naturalism became a literary movement.

Romanticism, preceding Realism and Naturalism, gave its readers profound delight through the imagination and the spiritual. Authors such as Hugo emphasized the beauty of nature, myth and spirituality throughout the Romantic period. Opposing these styles, Realists created a new vision grounded in a material view of nature and general psychological truths. In the past Plato defined Realism as the reality of intellectual and moral ideas that form an ideological view of the world. The Realists of the nineteenth century altered this definition by opposing the concept of the "ideal" and focusing instead on the concrete, provable facets of the world (Chevral, 19). If it could not be seen and proven, it was not a clear representation of life.
There is a direct line connecting Romanticism to Naturalism through the Realist movement. The Romantic's love and use of fine details in their literature created an outlet in which the Realists could expand their own ideas by focusing on the use of specifics to define what is exact and true in nature rather than in the imagination. The Naturalists took the concept one step further, as Chevral stated:

le naturalisme est tout naturellement une incarnation passagère de la tendance réaliste; il est même volontiers présenté comme un point extrême du réalisme, donc comme un hyper-réalisme (13).

By incorporating the explicit, detailed knowledge of the scientist, the Naturalist author was able to produce a representation of nature (including the society of man) in its so-called true scientific sense, including the two most important components of science (according to Zola): experimentation and observation. Zola stated in The Experimental Novel:

Novelists were the analyzers [and observers] of man, in his individual and social relations, [further stating that they] were experimental moralists, trying to direct and redirect society (18, 25).

Although Barthes remarks in Writing Degree Zero that Zola's novels created a "colorless writing that was irretrievably honest" (78), the main point of Naturalist
The idea was to affirm that:

l’art est l’expression de la vie sous tous ses modes et à tous ses degrés, et que son but unique est de reproduire la nature en l’amenant à son maximum de puissance et d’intensité (24).

Naturalism was considered a method, not a style, theme, or rhetoric. As Yves Chevral stated:

le naturalisme est une méthode de penser, de voir, de réfléchir, d’étudier, d’expérimenter, un besoin d’analyser pour savoir, mais non une façon spéciale d’écrire (27).

Logic was the line of reasoning; all strands of logic must be explainable and deducible.

Characteristics of Naturalism were based on “l’idée que l’humain [était] englobé dans le biologique” (Chevral, 35). Naturalists believed in encompassing ideas of determinism into the biological realm of heredity and the environment; they opposed the religious beliefs of predestination, fatality and destiny. The key words of the day were observation, analysis, experimentation, and determinism (Baguley, 148). All of this stemmed from a belief in human progress that ostensibly was to accompany the progress made in science, medicine, and industry, in the last half of the century. Henri Mitterand stated in Zola et le naturalisme:

la voie a été ouverte par les progrès de la médecine.
Naturalism not only rose out of these scientific advances, but also from:

the demographic expansion in Europe, the replacement of the textile by heavy industry leading to the birth of capitalism, and the scission of the French society into three mutually hostile classes (Barthes, 57).

These historical events made the creation of the Naturalist movement understandable. The mid-nineteenth century was a time when "classical writing ceased to be universal, and modern modes of writing came into being" (Barthes, 57). A comparison could be made between the scholastic and theological ages producing the Classical and Romantic literatures, and the scientific age corresponding to the Naturalist movement (Zola, The Experimental Novel, 31).

Many literary critics, historians, and readers questioned the existence of and the reasons behind the Naturalist movement. There can be no agreement, even on the start and the end of the movement. Some critics, like Alain Pagès, have stated that Naturalism was born and died with the authors who created it, such as Zola, Maupassant, and the Goncourts (Pagès, 18). According to another historian and literary critic, Germaine Mason in A Concise Survey of
French Literature, the movement continued into the first half of the twentieth century in the less known works of Octave Mirbeau and Emile Fabre (255).

The Naturalists could not define the movement among themselves. They appeared to support only their own highly individual philosophies, which created no cohesion within the literary movement. The writers seemed "refuser l'idée d'une unité du naturalisme: ... suivre leur voie propre, ... préserver leur indépendence" (Pages, 37). The separation of Naturalism from Realism, according to literary critics, happened well into the twentieth century. "Ce qui fait l'unité des écrivains naturalistes; c'est leur réflexion sur la méthode et les buts de l'écriture littéraire" (Pages, 40).

Some of the works of Naturalist writers were also questioned. As is discussed further in chapter two, a few Marxist critics felt that there was no place for the hero, that it was impossible to create one in a Naturalist form of literature. If one wrote about average daily lives, then there would be no room for heroes, or magnified characters made into giants. Did all the characters have to be horribly corrupted by society only to find themselves nowhere in the end? Where was the other side of life, the positive side? Was it all so horrible? Socrates once said, "l'instinct devient critique et la conscience créatrice" (Chevral, 55). Where was the "conscience créatrice" in
Naturalist literature. the absence of which made the works themselves seem to read so lopsidedly?

There were also questions as to the theory behind the writing of a scientific novel. Creative writing and science seemed contradictory. Upon closer examination, a novel could only be a mental construct, an imaginary experiment (Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, 14). The imagination remained free, uncaptured by scientific logic and the experimental laboratory of certainty. Therefore, the two concepts of the novel as an unproven creation and as science as the explainable through experimentation, could not mix, thus destroying the theory behind the Naturalist movement. Does this mean Naturalism no longer maintained its value? The value of the movement itself came from asking questions:

Le grand thème naturaliste devient donc celui d’une interrogation sur le degré d’intégration de l’individu dans la société...comment celle-ci fonctionne-t-elle? dans quelle mesure façonne-t-elle les individus qui y vivent? comment leur permet-elle de vivre? comment les accepte-t-elle, les rejette-t-elle, les transforme-t-elle? quelles sont les normes d’une vie sociale? ...

(Chevral, 105).

The evaluation of theories that are first defined by questions inevitably results in more questions. Finally, if one evaluates the movement as an art that incorporates the
ideas of the scientific generation, one could look at it as
Wellek does in *Concepts of Criticism from a Naturalist's*
point of view:

> Art should give a truthful representation of the real
world: it should therefore study contemporary life and
manners by observing meticulously and analyzing
carefully. It should do so dispassionately,
im impersonally, objectively (228).

When choosing to display his theories in the writing of
novels, Zola declared his desire to create art, not simply
scientific theory, but theory within the confines of art.

_Nana_, a Naturalist Novel

> _La Mouche d'Or._ était l'histoire d'une jeune fille: née
de quatre ou cinq générations d'ivrognes, le sang gâté
par une longue hérédité de misère et de boisson, qui se
transformait chez elle en un détraquement nerveux de
son sexe de femme. Elle avait poussé dans un faubourg;
sur le pavé parisien; et, grande, belle, de chair
superbe ainsi qu'une plante de plein fumier. elle
vengeait les gueux et les abandonnés dont elle était le
produit (Zola, _Nana_, 201).

Was Zola a crusader for the oppressed, or merely a
writer giving examples of the hopelessness of society, a man
lost in his own bourgeois world? By enlightening his public to the horrors of the lower classes, Zola could be seen as a liberator for the oppressed through knowledge. Others would just call him foul, boring, and tasteless. Perhaps people read Zola only for the "dirt" of the story; was naturalism, then, only "un succès de scandale" (Chevral, 201)? Having to deal with an audience that considered novels to be for entertainment only, Zola found his critics harsh and lashing. Nana, herself, implied this in her discussions on reading novels, "[elle] avait des opinions très arrêtées: elle voulait des œuvres tendres et nobles; des choses pour la faire rêver et lui grandir l'âme" (Nana, 310).

Zola, however, wanted to change this attitude, and change it he did:

Les romanciers naturalistes ont voulu introduire dans la littérature de nouveaux types de personnages, privés du pouvoir et de la liberté qui caractérisaient les héros du roman traditionnel, de la réalité sociale (Pagès, 74).

Nana was this kind of character. She was not a hero in any way, she was a courtesan and a street walker, who lived off and on the streets of Paris. Her character, however, was a little too far-fetched at times to truly master Zola's ideal of a real and typical person. Nana represented, instead, the anti-hero as a "force of nature, unaware of the evil
that she [did]" (Baguley, 78).

Nana, the daughter of Gervaise Macquart, born in the slums, represented a social reality for Paris’ quartier de la Goutte d’Or, during the nineteenth century:

Paris était là, le Paris des lettres, de la finance et du plaisir. beaucoup de journalistes, quelques écrivains, des hommes de Bourse, plus de filles que de femmes honnêtes (Nana, 14).

Yves Chevral called the prostitute, "le maillon fragile d’une société" (102). The courtesans were the only ones within society that could cross over to other class circles, making them the links connecting the circles to form an interlocking chain of society. For example, during the Grand Prix horse race, Nana was allowed to go up into the stands where only the upper class sat. Nana said of this crowd, "ces gens ne m’épatent plus, moi'...Je les connais trop!" (Nana, 330). Because she knew these people, she was able to realize that they were people, just as imperfect as all the rest. The final play, La Petite Duchesse, that Nana was in had an aristocratic woman (the character that Nana, herself, tried and failed to play). Nana asked of her, "pourquoi sa grande dame était-elle si honnête? Ce n’était pas nature" (Nana, 268). Nana knew, quite simply, that human nature was the same in the upper and lower classes.

Zola enjoyed using the surrounding history of the nineteenth century within his novels. The class structures
of the era played a grand role in Zola’s descriptive hereditary line that intertwined his novels, one to another creating the Rougon-Macquart series. With *Nana* Zola wanted to show that the aristocracy could be as corrupt as, or corrupted by (which Nana does with ease) the proletariat (Mitterand, 59). "This poor working-class girl from a slum background [became] the symbolic instrument of its [the upper class'] downfall" (Parmée, xi). In the black humor of the scene of Nana attacking Count Muffat, in full uniform, the count’s attire symbolized the society that she hated. Nana, straddling and straddled by French society, was obviously getting her revenge on a patriarchal society that she felt had created her problems. She was the fly in the aristocracy’s dung (see opening quote), wanting only to avenge herself: "[cette] jeune fille, ... de chair superbe ainsi qu’une plante de plein fumier, elle vengeait les gueux et les abandonnés dont elle était le produit" (*Nana*, 201).

*Nana* revealed the many facets of the class system and how they changed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The oldest families were being ruined, as Vandeuvres was when he committed suicide: "Ces anciennes familles étaient vidées, elles finissaient d’une façon bête" (*Nana*, 353). The debaucheries of society were infecting the high class world. "Quel singulier monde que ce monde parisien! Les salons les plus rigides se trouvaient envahis" (*Nana*, 71). All kinds of people, from all walks
of life, could be found mingling at parties, the theater, and even restaurants (especially Laure’s, an inexpensive restaurant for women, usually prostitutes or their clients, some lesbians - as well as men and women voyeurs). Even the women of the aristocracy had an obsessive fascination with ladies of easy virtue. Who were these women who could take away their husbands, for days and nights at a time, leaving their husbands wasted and poor, lying at the wives' feet?

Zola also enjoyed putting many historical and authentic details into his novels. *Nana* has many such examples. Her poxed flesh represented the France of Napoleon III struggling against death (Baguley, 78). The Legislative body declared war against Prussia on the very day Nana died. Douglas Parmée compared the collapse of the Second Empire to the death of Nana's beauty. These parallel fates makes one wonder if "either was ever more than a glittering facade, an illusion of beauty in her, an illusion of grandeur in the Imperial society" (Parmée, xxiv).

Zola intertwined many other authentic details into his novels, too. Starting the novel with L'Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867, and continuing with other places like the Casino de Paris, the Café Anglais, and the Lariboisière, made Zola's *Nana* all the more real to its readers.

Many Naturalist themes are alive in *Nana*. Zola's use of repetition runs throughout the story line. The entire
novel flows in a cyclical motion. Nana was poor and walking the streets, then she became the highest societal courtesan of Paris, only to fall to the streets again. "Nana retomba dans la crotte du début. Elle roula. elle battit le pavé de ses anciennes savates de petit torchon. en quête d’une pièce de cent sous" (Nana, 246). Then, once again, she climbed back up to the top of the courtesan ladder, regaining her former place among princes and counts. Repeated also, was the way she ascended, although a little differently, through the theater and its bordello-like society. Zola wanted to make clear, however, that things recur, but never quite in the same fashion. This corresponded to the cycles of nature. The ocean will always roll in on a wave, but that wave will be different every time it rolls in.

Some other themes Zola used in his novels are: themes of possession: of jouissance érotique: of draining and exhaustion; and of eating (Mitterand, 78). Each of these is present in Nana. Nana was continually surrounded by desire: she desired to possess, and others wanted to possess her. She always had a vice; there was always a person, or an object that she had to have. At first it was Fontan, then it was Satin. Both times, trying to possess them ruined the relationship. Fontan changed her entire life because of her "need" for him: "Il devenait son vice. qu’elle payait, son besoin, dont elle ne pouvait se passer, sous l’aiguillon des gifles" (Nana, 253). She craved objects as well as people.
Her altar bed. "un autel, où Paris viendrait adorer sa nudité souveraine" (Nana, 383), was her one last final vice. The men in her life, her victims some would say, were all eternally trying to possess Nana. They continually, one by one, asked her to marry them, and if she wouldn't, to at least to live with them, and be monogamous. However, Nana possessed her undesired victims, not her desired vices. "il (Muffat) comprit qu'il lui appartenait" (Nana, 139). All was within her grasp, except what she coveted which changed from day to day.

Zola's intrigue with the jouissance érotique played a large part in his stories. He seemed to enjoy describing (and inventing?) the sexuality of Nana herself, and the games courtesans played with their 'customers' and with each other (Satin and Nana). Victor Hugo once said, "la femme nue, c'est la femme armée" (Mitterand, 90). This sexual world of Nana left one feeling amazed at the depth of power this woman seemed to have. Delving into the details of the courtesan's sexuality and her body gave Zola's Nana all it needed to make the story appear real and tantalizing to the audience.

The theme of drainage and exhaustion kept Zola's readers interested. How much further could this woman go? How many more men could she ruin? The reader is compelled to read the story just to see how far Nana would go, what were her limits, if any. In the end, her only limitation
was death, the one thing she feared the most - that which made her ugly - death. "On est laid, quand on est mort, dit-elle d’une voix lente" (Nana, 356). She drained people of all they were worth, both monetarily and emotionally, sometimes to the death as with Georges, leaving a blood stain on Nana’s carpet where he stabbed himself in anguish, and Vandeuvres, who committed suicide in his own burning barn.

Her draining of people’s lives became a form of cannibalism:

Nana, en quelques mois, les mangea goulûment, les uns après les autres. Les besoins croissants de son luxe enrageaient ses appétits, elle nettoyait un homme d’un coup de dent (Nana, 405).

Nana was a man-eating beast who could sexually devour any man who walked into her den. "Zola’s treatment of the sexual and the digestive functions...has chiefly aroused his critics" (Baguley, 70). One critic, Jules Lemaître, noted of Nana:

she [was] a beautiful animal with a magnificent and unwholesome body, stupid, without grace and without heart, neither evil nor good, irresistible by the sole power of her sex (Baguley, 47).

These two notions of sex and digestion are two of the larger bodily functions around which Zola’s world revolves. Considered a faux pas in nineteenth-century social circles,
discussion of sex rarely took place. Although it was considered "wrong" to read Zola's novels because of their sexual "impurities," defined as a perversion in chapters two and three, the audience seemed to enjoy the "distastefulness" of the real, unsheltered world of prostitution that Zola displayed in *Nana*.

The biological functions of digestion and sex are only two of the many "unliterary" themes Zola put into his works as he delved into the biological realms of humanity, as a medical doctor does. To Zola, "le corps, c'est le peuple, le peuple, c'est le corps" (Mitterand, 79). In the descriptions of Nana's body, and her complete infatuation with herself, one again could see the biological, albeit sexual, side of Zola's Naturalism:

C'était une passion de son corps, un ravissement du satin de sa peau et de la ligne souple de sa taille, qui la tenait sérieuse, attentive, absorbée dans un amour d'elle-même (*Nana*, 200).

This narcissistic sentence shows the intense biological focus that Zola had on Nana's body: by honing in on the body so intently, Zola clearly intended to master mother nature by confronting her.

*Nana*, the "Golden Beast" of the nineteenth-century courtesan world became a monster. Continually compared to animals, the characters, especially Nana, brought one back to the world of Naturalism. "Le naturalisme..."
animal ... l'homme porte en lui dans ses instincts primoridiaux, une part de bestialité et de matérialité irrépressible" (Mitterand. 76). What interested Zola in people was their animalistic qualities.

In the end, Nana was the victim of all the havoc that she wreaked, though all was forgotten on her death bed: Autour d’elle, la grotte, toute en glace, faisait une clarté: des cascades de diamants se déroulaient, des colliers de perles blanches ruisselaient parmi les stalactites de la voûte; et, dans cette transparence, dans cette eau de source, traversée d’un large rayon électrique, elle semblait un soleil, avec sa peau et ses cheveux de flamme. Paris la verrait toujours comme ça, allumée au milieu du cristal, en l’air, ainsi qu’un bon Dieu (Nana, 429-430).

Nana died with holding the awe associated with myth, seen in the eyes of others as the irresistible, powerful, woman of easy virtue - deadly to the end.
CHAPTER I ENDNOTES

1. "Zolla" in Italian means "clod of dirt," ironically connecting Zola with the natural earth.

2. Zola died 5 October 1902 from asphyxiations due to a blocked chimney, and was moved to the Pantheon in 1908.

3. Throughout Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, Zola identified himself with Pascal. The character of Pascal had many of the writer's traits. This correlation shows how the author incorporated his own personal self into his work. He could not relinquish the individuality of the self in his writing. Zola's Naturalist views required an impartiality with his characters, but the writer could not remove himself from his work as completely as his theories would require.


5. Zola enjoyed his popularity. Pleasing his readers was one of the enjoyments he received from being a widely read writer. He found that this popularity stemmed from the jolt he gave his readers in unveiling the horrors of real life.


7. This was a problem Zola had with many of his story lines and characters. The myth and invention within Zola's novels tended to stray away from his own Naturalist's ideas; a contradiction about which many critics have questioned him.

8. The power in Nana's body and her sexuality will be discussed further in later chapters.

9. The theory of animal-like characters often tends to destroy Zola's desired ends. Animalistic traits pertain to many mythical stories. Applying the same type of traits to his characters diminishes his goal of de-myth'ifying the novel. The concept of myth will be clarified in chapter three.
Chapter 2: Power in Nana

Nana, a Nineteenth-Century Woman

A first reading of Nana produces a view of a monstrous, machine-like courtesan that appears to be an all-powerful man-eater; Zola, himself, seems to be the porte-parole of the nineteenth-century anti-feminist bourgeois world. The "pure" woman, the mother (which will be discussed further in chapter three), should be in the home, spending all her time and energy taking care of her children and making her husband happy. Upon closer analysis of Nana, one realizes that Zola exposed the exact opposite side of the bourgeois world by representing the underlying causes of women's repression - a result of patriarchal power struggles. Simply, he stated that women were stifled in the nineteenth century (in Nana, in the form of prostitutes controlled by the patriarchy), and thus Zola exposed their unrecognized repression.

Coming from a lower-class family, Nana was immediately sentenced to a rough life of oppression as a woman. Prostitution was the only way of life that she found at which she could make a living. Compared to low wages in factories and the rough treatment of live-in maids, prostitution paid better and had an easier lifestyle. Noting the societal norms of the nineteenth century, Zola
was able to meld his hereditary and environmental theories with the character of Nana. As she was from a proletarian family, Zola could connect these theories to this young woman, who turned to prostitution (a typical "career" for a lower-class woman), as a result of her destitute family lineage and her impoverished surroundings.

These environments were not uncommon in this era. In fact, because of the many prostitution problems in Paris, society and the government started to try to control the workers by regulating their work with laws and manipulating the change of societal norms relating to woman and her sex. This was done through a system of carding, making prostitutes register with the law in a form of "legalized" prostitution. Moses states in *French Feminism in the 19th Century*:

Sexual difference was enshrined in the new legal codes, which not only weakened women's position relative to men's but also, ironically, helped shape feminist consciousness by making unmistakably visible the significance of sex as a status category (x). Sex as a class structural means in defining status with social classes reveals that motherhood and prostitution are at odds with one another in the eyes of the patriarchal class structure. These structures weaken the power of women to control their own lives. Nana, both a prostitute and a mother (as many prostitutes of the day were), was able to
escape some of the standard structures by defying the norms set by society, because she was the "ideal" powerful courtesan, "une femme chic, rentière de la bêtise et de l'ordure des mâles, marquise des hauts trottoirs" (Nana, 286) - the one who gained the most monetarily, and then lost the most in death. The truth is that "the dramatic increase in the numbers of prostitutes in the first decades of the nineteenth century was a result of the abject conditions in which poor women lived and worked" (Moses, 30). Whether they were considered "poor daughters of the people" (Moses, 68) or monsters of the lower class, these women, Nana included, held an undefinable, fallen status.

Having previously noted that medicine, science, environment, and heredity reflect the nineteenth-century Naturalist movement, one notes how philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault's theories in History of Sexuality correlate these ideas with women's sexuality:

the analysis of heredity was placing sex (sexual relations, venereal diseases, matrimonial alliances, perversions) in a position of "biological responsibility" with regard to the species: ... The medicine of perversions and the programs of eugenics were the two great innovations in the technology of sex of the second half of the nineteenth century (118).

According to Foucault, the nineteenth century was represented by practitioners of medicine, or in other words
by science, following the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which were ruled by the Church (History of Sexuality, 47). Therefore, prostitutes were also seen by society as products of familial history, or sexual disease diagnosed as perversion. Nana is a prime example of perversion at its extreme.

Foucault saw these social and historical grounds as a battlefield, a power field of struggle, here a struggle for woman. Jana Sawicki notes in Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body that "[power] circulates in this field and is exercised on and by individuals over others as well as themselves" (25). Thus, Nana's exercising of power bordered because of her hard life full of struggles merely to live in the prostitute's world within nineteenth-century society (this is a sample of Zola using real life as Nana's theme).

A Foucauldian Exploration of "Power" in Nana

Madame Irma of Chamont, the "reine puissante, comblée d'ans et d'honneurs" (Nana, 185), was a role model for Nana. She was a courtesan who in her old age became well-respected by the community as a great and powerful woman. As in this statement, power is expressed oftentimes as being possessed by someone. Foucault redefines "power" as an exercise between individuals, "exercised in the interplay of
nongalitarian and mobile relations" (History of Sexuality, 94), with many aftereffects, such as repression or domination. "results proceeding from their interaction (power relations)" ("The Subject and Power," 432).

Individuals are the vehicles as well as the targets of power. Nana appeared to be a grand vehicle for power, but where did her power come from? From a Foucauldian perspective she could be considered a woman trapped by her class and her past, her social and hereditary background. Having grown up in a torrid neighborhood and family, this young woman easily found herself in the position of working as a prostitute to live, creating a massive amount of repressed anger at the society that surrounded her. This repression, a result of past powerful patriarchal institutions controlling the social norms of what a woman should and should not be, helped to create her life of struggle and tension, which led to a battlefield for power.

The word "power" in this essay is crucial, and yet difficult to define. In French "puissance" and "pouvoir" both translate as "power," thus making the distinction between the two even more important. Zola used "puissance," with the definition of power as an influence over another. Foucault, on the other hand, defines power through "pouvoir," implying the power held in institutions or alliances like the government. "Pouvoir" is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a
particular society" (History of Sexuality, 93). These definitions can be correlated by focusing on the "pouvoir" that revolves around Nana, while working with her female body's "puissance." "Power" must be an all-encompassing term, implying both a Foucauldian and Zolien definition.

Nana appeared to be powerful by controlling men through her sex: "Nana était nue. Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la tout-puissance de sa chair" (Nana, 30). Because of Nana's all-powerful (puissance) flesh (sexual), she appeared to exercise "pouvoir" over men with her own sexual actions, and by responding to others' actions. In his essay "The Subject and Power," Foucault states that a power relation "acts upon Others' actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future" (427). Because of other's actions within patriarchy, Nana reacted by exercising her sexual power. In considering this primary critique of the exercising of power, Molinaro states that "power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and...it only exists in action" (Foucault, Feminism, and Power, 21).

The exercising of power is only the first of Foucault's oppositions to the traditional "juridico-discursive" model of power. To further discuss Nana's role with power, one can analyze this model. Foucault states that power is:

1. exercised rather than possessed
Nana’s power always came from the exercising of action through her body and her sex as previously discussed. Further discussions of Foucault’s second and third critiques on productivity of power, and repression as its instrument, along with the ideology of power rising from the bottom up, will be discussed in the next few sections.

Regulation’s Power through Government and Nana’s Escape

By revealing Nana’s repression, Zola enables her silent liberation in the form of exercising power with her sexuality. However, it is important to remember while relating these ideas of Foucault to Nana, that his theories serve less to explain than to criticize and raise questions. Jana Sawicki states that Foucault’s “histories of theory are designed to reveal their contingency and thereby free us from them” (47). Nana used her sexuality to exercise power, to free herself from her repressive social surroundings. Connecting sexuality and power in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault states that:

Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. ... that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power...
prescribes an "order" for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law (83).

Nana and her sexuality were within the binary system of the courtesan and the "pure" woman, both which will be discussed further in chapter three. Her sexuality was forbidden (disregarding social norms), contradicting her "clients'" wives' sexuality, in the form of motherhood, which was licit (if perhaps unwanted). Easily defined within society’s patriarchal systems (law), Nana’s life of prostitution was illicit.

Etymologically speaking prostitution means "to set or place forth, in public" (Bernheimer, 1). Within a highly structured class system of the nineteenth century, Nana displayed publicly her sex, whether through the theater, licitly, or through public displays of affection, illicitly. Thus, the patriarchal society found her a threat to the social norms. In order to control these public displays of sexuality by prostitutes, the law enforced their hold on society. In Foucauldian terms the law corresponds to the government or the alliance creating the social norms of society. In "The Subject and Power" Foucault defines the terms of government, using the very broad meaning from the sixteenth century:

It designated the way in which the conduct of
individuals or of groups might be directed: the
government of children, of souls, of communities, of
families, of the sick. ...[and on] modes of action
which were destined to act upon the possibilities of
action of other people (428).
Nana was bound to the ideologies of the nineteenth century
(as everyone is in their own time). The social norms were
set by the "law." Law here relates directly to the control
of sexuality, and whether it is the repression or liberation
of sexuality is irrelevant. One is controlled by the
"status quo." As Biddy Martin states in her essay
"Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault:"

The talk about sex, the obsession with it are part of
the operations of power in contemporary society; they
make normalization and control possible and invisible.
To insist, then, on more and more sex and a greater
freedom to speak it is to isolate sexuality and
ourselves, to misunderstand "sexuality" in ways that
allow for a systematization and regulation of desire
toward particular social and political ends (8).
Therefore, Nana's obsession with her body, enabled her to
control (and be controlled by - depending on her level of
power) the law, or the normalizing alliance. At the height
of her "career," directly correlating to her power, opposing
the norms with her own control, Nana was able to overthrow
patriarchal power: "et comme l'orchestre faisait obstacle,
on le prit d’assaut, on cassa les chaises et les pupitres. Une police paternelle organisait le désordre" (Nana, 352).

The mere fact that the "paternal" police did not arrest all the courtesans, but cleaned up after them, was amazing and a true triumph for Nana’s entourage of fellow courtesans. A courtesan who exercised her power with her sex, Nana created a rift in a society that was built around her by the alliance, also known as the law and government, to control the people.

Rebelling against the patriarchy, Nana threatened the structures of contemporary power alignments set by the law. She shifted some of the power to herself, restructuring the alliance and the law, forcing them to accept her as a power source. As Foucault stated, "a policing of sex [is] not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses" (A History of Sexuality, 25). In the past Nana was continually running from the police who tried to regulate all prostitutes, her being sure to get arrested and marked for life as a prostitute if caught:

C’était une épouvante de la loi, une terreur de la préfecture, si grande, que certaines restaient paralysées sur la porte des cafés, dans le coup de force qui balayait l’avenue (Nana, 250).

At the height of her career, Nana overcame the power of the law, enabling her to control and maintain her power.
publicly, which she exercised over others.

The law of the nineteenth century governed sex through two great systems that still hold today, the system of marriage and the order of desires (what is considered acceptable sexually). In Nana, the married women, like Mme. Hugon, were within the standards accepted by the norm. The prostitutes who were regulated and carded, were watched and maintained by the police in order to try to control the prostitutes’ sexual activities, the order of desires. Moses gives a good description of this regulation:

During the nineteenth century, a system of legal prostitution, involving registration and police regulation, existed, but clandestine prostitutes accounted for two-thirds of the total estimated number (30).

In order to supposedly control sex, the government thought they only had to implement a law of prohibition through setting new societal standards or laws. However, a law of desire was practically impossible to enforce, as prostitution and sex involve uncontrollable factors, such as emotion, intimacy, and privacy.® When discussing Nana’s power relations in terms of law’s institution:

one must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa, and that the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an
institution, is to be found outside the institution ("The Subject and Power," 429).

Thus, one can see that the point of anchorage for Nana's power relations was outside the social realm of alliance — her clients within her own social networks existing outside the law.

Speaking of Nana's power exercised over consenting men outside the alliance, opens a door to the third critique of Foucauldian philosophy — power rising from the bottom up. The others over which power is exercised, the people under Nana's control, must make the choice of being in the realm of her power. "Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and [the] ruled at the root of power relations" (History of Sexuality, 94). The characters living within Nana's nineteenth-century social standards were not slaves. Therefore, as Foucault states, "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (428); and furthermore "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape" ("The Subject and Power," 431). Nana's strategy was to maintain victory in her continual situations of confrontation and struggle, by luring her customers, then toying with them, basically playing with them like a yo-yo. Muffat is a good example of this:

Mais un sourd travail s'opérait et Nana le reconquérait lentement, par les souvenirs, par les lâchetés de sa
Another good instance was Nana's ability to make men produce money to stay with her, even to the point of stealing and going to jail, like Philippe did: "Philippe était en prison de la veille au soir, on l'accusait d'avoir volé douze mille francs à la caisse de son régiment" (Nana, 387). The courtesan was an addiction for men. Always verbally free to go (Nana made sure that her clients always knew that they were free to go - especially if they had no money), her customers would do anything to stay in her good graces. This unconscious form of mental power through addiction was Nana's strongest control factor. Unable to escape her sexual trap, her body and her sex, the men crumbled to her feet with desire in their loins.

Zola's Nana as a Perversion

Another interesting practice evident in the time of Nana is the medicalization and hysterization of women's bodies. Sexuality "up to the end of the eighteenth century, [was governed by] canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law" (Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 37). The laws on sexuality in the nineteenth century began to loosen because "problems" or "abnormalities" associated with sexuality, for example
perversions (like female sexual self-awareness - defined by the social norm, the "government"), began to be "curable" by psychiatric or medical means; the law itself often deferred to medicine. People began to see Nana and other prostitutes as perversions, those who have hereditary or biological problems. Zola portrayed this attitude in Nana and Nana's family background. An understanding of perversion is needed in order to comprehend how Zola defined Nana in "non-human" terms (such as machine, animal and myth, all topics covered in chapter three). As Foucault states in The History of Sexuality:

The growth of perversions is not a moralizing theme that obsessed the scrupulous minds of the Victorians. It is the real product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures (48).

These ideologies can be seen in the way Zola's theories of science were incorporated into the novel. To Zola, perversions came from biological factors such as heredity, and environmental factors such as society. In The Experimental Novel, Zola stated:

I consider that the question of heredity has a great influence in the intellectual and passionate manifestations of man. I also attach considerable importance to the surroundings (19).

Nana seen as a perversion by society that surrounds her is viewed in her biological background as the daughter of a
proletariat drunkard, and her socially unacceptable environment of prostitution.

The hysterization of women's bodies was, as Foucault states, "a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed-qualified and disqualified-as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (History of Sexuality, 104). Because Nana publicly portrayed this saturation, she became even more of a physical perversion. Zola medicalized the writing of Nana's body by focusing on the body itself, instead of alluding to a non-physical mystical analogy as previously seen in the Romantic era:

Elle pliait le cou, regardant avec attention dans la glace un petit signe brun qu'elle avait au-dessus de la hanche droite; et elle le touchait du bout du doigt, elle le faisait saillir en se renversant davantage, le trouvant sans doute drôle et joli. À cette place Puis, elle étudia d'autres parties de son corps (Nana, 201).

With all of Nana's attention focused on her body in a mirror, Nana found a small mark that she particularly enjoyed discovering. Using the word étudier in the discovery of her body, Zola emphasizes his focus on writing the body biologically. Even though it is written with physical descriptions, this passage, although tastefully done, opposes the nineteenth-century norm. During this era, women clothed themselves thoroughly, not exposing their
bodies, thus enhancing the contrast of Nana's powerful female sexual *jouissance* to those of the typical pure woman. Representing someone who was sexually different because of her autoeroticism implied (to the societal norm) that she was abnormal - thus, concluding the prognosis of perversion.

Prostitution and perversion seemed to go hand-in-hand in *Nana*. When speaking of some of their clients, Nana and Satin recognize the perversity of their job:

*Elle avait bien un peu peur, car les plus comme il faut étaient les plus sales. Tout le vernis craquait, la bête se montrait, exigante dans ses goûts monstrueux, raffinant sa perversion* (*Nana*, 249).

Because her "job" was outside the recognized social norms of society as an uncarded prostitute, Nana was a perversion of society, bringing out the perverse nature of her clients.

Power in Nana's Self-Knowledge of Her Body, Dispelling Truth through Silence

Even with the apparent power of Nana through the pleasure sources of her sexuality, one questions the self-awareness of her position of power. However, she is well-aware of her source of sexuality - her body - and that is enough for her to maintain power. The more Nana knows about her body, the more power she has; as Foucault states in *The History of Sexuality*:
Throughout the nineteenth century, sex seems to have been incorporated into two very distinct orders of knowledge: a biology of reproduction, which developed continuously according to a general scientific normativity, and a medicine of sex conforming to quite different rules of formation (54).

By escaping these orders of knowledge, Nana escaped the institutive structure enabling her to retain power. Because she did not adhere to these normative standards of reproduction and scientific normativity, Nana was able to liberate herself from societal restraints such as denial of female jouissance. Nana’s knowledge of the biology of reproduction is minimal (see endnote 7), but her power lies in her knowledge of sex and the powers of the flesh, and others’ recognition through discourse of her power. From a Foucauldian perspective, however, it is not this freedom that is powerful, but silence: procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret: I have in mind the confession (58)...Confession frees, but power reduces on to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom (History of Sexuality, 60).

Although Nana knew of her powerful sexuality, she rarely spoke of it. The recognition from others of this power was
what solidified her control which can be seen in many discourses. Mignon, a pimp in Nana’s circle of “friends,” spoke of Nana’s sex, “Ah! nom de Dieu! quel outil!” (Nana, 419). This tool, about which many exclaimed amazement, empowered Nana, who remained silent about her sexual power.

Remaining silent was Nana’s unknown power source. Because she was basically unaware of why she had gained so much wealth (monetarily), she could not worry about it. Discourses by others, true or untrue, empowered her simply because people gave her enough credit to render discussion. Nana escaped the search for truth because she was unable to feel any form of guilt for her actions (although in some crises she felt a tinge of remorse). All she knew was the sexuality of her silent flesh.

Muffat is a good example of someone unable to escape this search for truth, a truth overriding his need for and a reason why he was subject to power: the Church and confession continually haunted him. He constantly felt the need to confess his carnal sins:

C’était un prolongement religieux des voluptés de Nana, avec les balbutiements, les prières et les désespoirs, les humilités d’une créature maudite écrasée sous la boue de son origine. Au fond des églises, les genoux glacés par les dalles, il retrouvait ses jouissances d’autrefois, les spasmes de ses muscles et les ébranlements délicieux de son intelligence, dans une
mème satisfaction des obscurs besoins de son être

(Nana, 417).

Because of Muffat's loss of self in Nana, he was left with the guilt associated with his formally religious upbringing. Searching for his own "truth" he looks, once again, back to the Church for confession, hoping that by confessing his sins he will regain "le Moi" again. This form of discourse failed him, for he was eternally anchored in his pleasure found in Nana's silent and powerful flesh.

Foucault's triad of pleasure/power/knowledge is one of the key theories in his *History of Sexuality*. He sees power and knowledge as interchangeable (especially in discourse). Power anchors the pleasure that it uncovers. Nana anchored her power through the pleasure that her sex provided to her customers:

Elle, c'était avec autre chose, une petite bêtise dont on riait, un peu de sa nudité délicate, c'était avec ce rien honteux et si puissant, dont la force soulevait le monde, que toute seule, sans ouvriers, sans machines inventées par des ingénieurs, elle venait d’ébranler Paris et de bâtir cette fortune où dormaient des cadavres (Nana, 419).

Through her manipulative and seductive ways, Nana overwhelmed her world, creating a perfect setting in which she exercised her power. As knowledge and power has been discussed, Nana's connection of pleasure with power
completes the triangle:

Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement (History of Sexuality, 48)

By body alone, working as a machine, Nana invaded the souls and bodies of her lovers with her silent sexual body.

From Proletarian Prostitute to Aristocratic Courtesan

Nana, as a high-level courtesan, could float in and out of different classes and therefore, different social norms. She incited and channelled desire,11 attaching individuals to herself through her sexuality, and generating and focusing individual energies towards herself. These situations are defined by Foucault as sexual arenas of struggle, neither outside power, nor wholly circumscribed by it (Sawicki, 43). Power was created by the rift that Nana created in the alliance, the institutions that surrounded and created societal norms.

In order to create a power struggle, there must be tension between the individuals, "at every moment the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries" ("The Subject and Power," 432). The law and Nana confronted each other throughout the novel. Nana's
tension arose out of her lower-class upbringing, represented by the law in *Nana*, that placed her among the proletariat, repressing her, forcing her to avenge herself on the patriarchy that created this class system. This form of "pouvoir" at its extreme represents repression. The society that surrounded Nana was repressive, not allowing her to change her true class status by maintaining her in a prostitute's life. Nana was able to see her captors' activities, knowing she was able to join in, but also knowing that she was forever bound to her title of courtesan. She fought this repression through her own sexual power institution, her body.12

Appearing at first to hold little power in her repressed class status, Nana remade her world to ultimately empower herself.13 A courtesan with many lovers of different classes, Nana was able to move in and out of different social scenes. From the low-class restaurant of Laure's to the aristocratic social scene of the daughter of the Muffat's wedding, Nana moved in and out, creating talk wherever she went.

Laure's was a place where the price of three francs was fixed for those who came to eat. The establishment was owned by Laure Piedefer, "une dame de cinquante ans, aux formes débordantes, sanglée dans des ceintures et des corsets...[un] monstre, les yeux mouillés" (*Nana*, 234). Kissing all who entered, this "monster" of a woman was the
focus of a circle of woman and men of all sexual outlets - the perfect place for a man like Zola to create his examples of biological, sexual "perversion." At one moment in the story, Nana discovers that one who appears to be a man is actually a woman: "Mais, comme le jeune homme riait, sa poitrine gonfla. Tiens, c'est une femme!" (Nana, 235). Transvestites and lesbians were unacceptable in external, public, social circles, but at Laure's, anything went.

A complete opposite scenario was the wedding (arranged by Nana, herself) of Daguenet, Nana's old boyfriend and Estelle, Muffat's daughter. Nana's entrance showed her ability to adapt to any situation:

Nana vient d'arriver...Oh! une entrée, mes enfants! quelque chose de pharamineux!... D'abord, elle a embrassé la comtesse. Ensuite, quand les enfants se sont approchés, elle les a bénis en disant à Daguenet: "Ecoute, Paul, si tu lui fais des queues, c'est à moi que tu auras à faire..." Comment! vous n'avez pas vu ça! Oh! un chic! un succès! (Nana, 370).

Nana's comfortable air surrounded her, empowering her, while everyone around her was in awe of her ease and style, still recognizing her status as courtesan. Simple hugs and kisses to the "comtesse" and intimate talk with the groom implied her acceptance (acceptance to the point of allowing her to be there, not acceptance as aristocracy; she was still a man-eating prostitute) within the setting.
So, how did Nana come to dominate her clients? Foucault’s definition of domination can be applied to the prostitution circles in *Nana*:

consolidated by means of a long-term confrontation between adversaries, ...[it is] in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society ("The Power and Subject," 432).

Nana constantly struggled, though rarely lost, with her adversaries, both the wives of her lovers and the lovers themselves: "Peu à peu, Nana avait pris possession du public, et maintenant chaque homme la subissait" (*Nana*, 31).

Taking possession of her public through her bodily entrancements, Nana was able to control her adversaries.

Systems of domination are always moving, just as all power support systems do, "[they] are always in the process of being displaced, overthrown, superseded" (McNay, 14).

New struggles continually surrounded Nana, enabling her to juggle her possessive power to fit almost any situation. Whether it was she who changed her mind, or others who fell through, Nana continued to be strong. For example, when Muffat and Nana made a "deal" that Nana was to sleep only with him, and Nana could not keep her promise, this did not
stop Muffat from giving himself and all that he was to her:

Si ça ne te convient pas, tu vas me faire le plaisir de sortir... Je ne veux pas que tu cries chez moi... Mets bien dans ta caboche que j′entends être libre. Quand un homme me plaît, je couche avec. Parfaitement, c′est comme ça... Et il faut te décider tout de suite, oui ou non, tu peux sortir. ...Il ne sortit pas (Nana, 399).

Nana could control Muffat simply because she had something that he could not live without - her sex.

When others fell through for her, most specifically in money matters, Nana always had her most valuable resource, her body, which she would sell to pay urgent bills. While talking to herself, Nana said: "Va, va, ma fille, ne compte que sur toi... Ton corps t′appartient, et il vaut mieux s′en servir que de subir un affront" (Nana, 391). Her body was what dominated others as well as what enabled her to earn a living.

Jana Sawicki relates the dominatory facets of man to the body as an "analysis of disciplinary power ... [which isolates] disciplinary technologies of women′s bodies that are dominating and hence difficult to resist" (14). Nana′s body was her strongest system of power, what she knew best and knew to be irresistible: "C′était son peuple qui l′applaudissait, tandis que, droite dans le soleil, elle dominait avec ses cheveux d′astre et sa robe blanche et bleue, couleur du ciel" (Nana, 349). With a radiant and
powerful body, Nana dominated the many people that surrounded her, with the control of her sex.
1. Eugenics is "a science that deals with the improvement of hereditary qualities of a race or breed" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary).

2. Naturalist's use of the real life story line destroyed the ideology of the hero. Zola and Foucault, having no utopian vision, believed in the concept of the loss of heroism within literature and social society. Quoting himself from Discipline and Punishment in an interview for Technologies of the Self, Foucault states, "this turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization" (99).

3. The "juridico-discursive" model of power in the "traditional revolutionary theory" of power, maintaining these three traits:
   1. Power is possessed
   2. Power flows from a centralized source from top to bottom
   3. Power is primarily (Sawicki, 20).

4. Foucault does not deny the repression of power. He is stating that repressive power represents power in its most frustrated and extreme form. The need to resort to a show of force is more often evidence of a lack of power (Sawicki, 21).

5. These displays are not actually sexual acts done in public, but public displays of sexuality - for example in their dress and their explicit show of sex as a "consumer product" for sale.

6. It is important to note here that emotions and intimacy played a small part, if any, in the eyes of the prostitutes themselves. However, their customers could extend a fond and caring nature towards the women, especially in Nana's case.

7. Nana obviously knows about as much as she can about her body as displayed by her autoeroticism; but she does not accept parts of her body, like its ability to become pregnant, seen to her as a betrayal (discussed in chapter three).

8. As stated before, the truth of discourse is unimportant in power situations. Truth does not lead to power, but to a freedom given by another as in confession, not by the self. Power is a liberation of the self through silence.
3. Nana's power is in the knowledge of her body, not in the knowledge of her power.

10. The hysterisation of women's bodies has been placed into the confines of discourse through confession and psychoanalysis.

11. Foucault, however, would focus on bodies and their pleasures rather than on desire.

12. "Foucault rejects the notion of repression as the mode of power-knowledge-pleasure because it is too easy: the naive belief that we liberate ourselves, that one who speaks [of] repression is therefore outside its force, that we transgress and therefore subvert" (Diamond and Quinby, 48).

13. Oppression defined as unjust exercise of power (the social norms keeping her locked into prostitution) may be a better word here, opposing the definition of repression, being the unacceptable desires left to operate in the unconscious. For Nana, her repression was not subconscious, although it may have started as such, hence enabling her to fight for a place in society. She knew from experience that she could not escape her life because she had tried it, while living with Fontan, and also while living out in the countryside, but this did not mean she could not invade the lives of others, of higher social status, as a form of unconscious revenge. "Unconscious revenge" because there is little in the novel that leads us to believe that her actions were consciously acted upon. Although men are oftentimes referred to as pigs, "les cochons, oh! les cochons!" (Nana, 255), implying a form of patriarchal distaste, Zola makes sure that the reader continues to see Nana as an inconspicuous courtesan who merely acts on her instincts as an over-sexed, saturated female perversion.
In Zola's novels, a character's name often defines and clarifies his/her traits. The pure woman in Zola's works has a fluid name, a name which represents high character and acceptance of motherhood, like Clotilde, with the lilting l's of a rhythmic cadence, in Zola's Doctor Pascal. Nana, on the other hand, conjures notions of sex and frolic with its short teasing repetition.

The choice of name may also be a means of objectifying the character, just as objects like cars or boats are often given female names. Alain Pagès in his book, Le Naturalisme, speaks of a boat that was named Nana, "une barque que l'on baptise du nom de Nana" (49). The objectifying of a subject creates a whole new realm for the author when he attributes traits to a character. The author would be able to use not only human traits, but non-human traits as well.¹

Another way to look at Nana's name is in the primitive qualities it relates. In F. W. J. Hemming's essay on Emile Zola, he states, "It [Nana] is a primitive sound, one of the early, sensual lisplings of mankind; Nana was a cognomen of the Babylonian Ishtar" (Baguley, 99). In choosing a name, an author must be aware of all its connotations, which
can enlarge the character's definitive traits.

When writing *Nana*, Zola was aware of the connections between the name and the subject. In some scenes Nana directly reflected the sound of her name. Bernheimer speaks of the scene in which Nana is indulging herself by the simple pleasure that she finds in her own body (*Nana*, 200). He states:

*The scene is somehow the visual equivalent of Nana's name, a name that doubles itself as if in c-nana-istic admiration of its first syllable, a name that invites repetition yet suggests negativity (Nana, no-no) (223).*

Thus, when coupled with sexuality, especially "mono"-sexuality or autoeroticism (a 19th century "perversion"), Nana reflects the societal negations (or no-no's) of a nineteenth-century ideology of sex. Is Zola trying to relate the negative in women's sexuality? Naomi Schor speaks of "the exploitation of the enigma constituted by her [Nana's] name" (*Breaking the Chain*, 33). Describing Nana as an object or an animal, Schor states that Zola exploits women as mysterious and unexplainable creatures with their strange sexuality so foreign to men. When patriarchy is the creator of the norms of society, all female sexuality become "perversions" or "no-no's." This enigma of sexuality and Nana's definitive name seem to walk hand-in-hand in *Nana*. 
The Self within Nana

Is Nana simply an image in man's mind, enhanced by the sound of her name, "le poème des désirs du mâle" (Jennings, 58), or does this novel represent a woman who is a subject instead of an object? In Foucault's *Technologies of the Self*, he states that:

Concern for self always refers to an active political and erotic state. ... It is always a real activity and not just an attitude. ... The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance (24-25).

How does Nana gain subjectivity of the self? In Foucauldian terms, Nana's prostitution engages her in active erotic endeavors. Her actions imply an attitude of self-preservation. Using her body as a marketable resource, "her body [being] both what she owns and what she owns with" (Stange, 205), Nana was able to make a living. As a high-class courtesan, or a street prostitute, Nana made her living through the "real activity" (opposing attitude) of prostitution for the care of her self, not only enabling her to make a living but also wishing to break the "bondage of class as well as gender that keeps her in a prison of the self" (Showalter, 184).²

In his essay, "The Subject and Power," Foucault questions today's perception of the self in the form of the
"Not-I" instead of the universalizing "I": "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (424). Nana refused what she was through her denial of the harm she caused the men with whom she was involved, merely seeking to possess herself. In Chapter eleven when Vandeuvres has committed suicide, Nana is blamed for his death by Vandeuvres' old lover, Blanche. To escape the blame, Nana denies her part in his death:

Quand je pense que Blanche a eu le toupet de vouloir me mettre ça sur le dos! J’ai répondu: "Est-ce que je lui ai dit de voler!" N’est-ce pas? on peut demander de l’argent à un homme, sans le pousser au crime...

(Nana, 353).

She seems not to believe that she was responsible in any way for her lover's death. Nana was obviously concerned for her self, but her definition of the self envisioned a woman not so deliberately conniving as she appeared to others. Nana was free to define her self, escaping society's description, in her denial of her part in Vandeuvre's death. This liberation of the self is important when trying to escape the hold society had on her reputation: as Jana Sawicki states in Disciplining Foucault, "We are free in being able to question and reevaluate our inherited identities and values, and to challenge received interpretations of them" (101). Challenging society's accusations liberates Nana with her own sense of self as a subject.
It can be shown easily, by defining Nana’s
subjectivity, that Nana definitely knows her own body and
sexuality through self-exploration: "C'était une passion de
son corps, un ravissement du satin de sa peau et de la ligne
souple de sa taille, qui la tenait sérieuse, attentive,
absorbée dans un amour d'elle-même" (Nana, 200). Luther H.
Martin, in his essay in The Technologies of the Self,
reminds us that "According to Socrates, to know oneself one
must know both one’s body, one’s sexuality, and how to
participate in the sociopolitical world" (55). Questions
arise when one tries to put Nana into context with the
sociopolitical world that surrounds her. To do this one
must be able to define who Nana was in the societal class
system of her time. What was a woman to Zola, a human, an
animal, or a machine? Zawicki notes:

Someone has suggested that Anonymous was a woman. The
absence of a sense of self, of one’s value and
authority, and of the legitimacy of one’s needs and
feelings is a hallmark of femininity as it has been
defined in many patriarchal contexts (Disciplining
Emancip. 103).

The "pure woman" in Zola’s novels represents the one who
gives up her sense of self in order to maintain an
anonymous, non-interfering relationship. Madame Hugon, the
mother of two of Nana’s lovers, was such a woman, who did
not interfere until her sons were both ruined by Nana. The
pure woman is supposed to portray the true woman, but the
inhuman and improbable traits of perfection make the woman's
lifestyle almost impossible. Nana, as a femme fatale,
however, opposes this way of life. Unable to adhere to this
perfect normative life, Nana was created by Zola with
adjectives of machine, animal, and myth-like qualities,
destroying her womanly human traits. Who is this Nana - a
prostitute/courtesan, a mother, or merely a myth created by
Zola to represent man's sexual image of female jouissance?

Nana, the **Femme Fatale**

*Le sang prostitué brûle de veine en veine.*

*Etouffant l'idéal, tarissant la beauté.*

*Disputant jusqu'à l'âme à la Divinité,*

*Lui transmettant du corps la honte et la souillure,*

*Et versant de sa fange à toute créature* (Louise Colet, *The Defiant Muse*, 141).

Shining with all her splendor, the **femme fatale**
enthralls her audience like "blasing starres" (Praz, 190). With all the dark glamour of a comet, Nana represents the epitome of the many **femme fatale** clichés. Defining the **femme fatale** has proven a difficult task as many critics take the meaning of the word for granted. Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony* clarifies the expression by citing examples
in certain literary works, primarily with the recognition that it is not a new term:

There have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life, and real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters (189).

As a historical archetype, the *femme fatale* "unites in [her]self all forms of seduction, all vices, and all delights (210). ... [This] superwoman also assumes an attitude of defiance to society" (Praz, 261). Taking into account Nana's love of vice, mastery of seduction, and exorbitant taste for men, women and objects (all of which are documented in the text), allows one to recognize readily Nana within the confines of Praz's definition. Defying all social norms, Nana renders men, like Muffat, Georges, Philippe, and Vandeuvres, helpless. Praz defines the relationship between Muffat and Nana using D'Annunzio's character Isabella Inghirami, "...the man feels horror for the woman and at the same time an attraction which is part of his sense of horror" (269). Muffat couldn't understand his abject need for this horrific woman, he only knew he needed her, "...il ne restait dans le tourment de sa passion que par un besoin lâche, par une épouvante de la vie, à l'idée de vivre dans elle" (Nana, 381).
When a man treats Nana in a horrible fashion, like Fontan does by physical abuse, Nana responds in a complete opposite fashion than with the men she devours: "Il se fouettait, il lançait au visage de Nana, dans un flot d’injures, toutes sortes d’accusations, l’une sur l’autre, sans lui permettre de se défendre" (Nana, 239). Praz describes this abuse as a source of bliss for Nana. "he [in this case, Fontan] showers abuse upon her. [and] she abandons herself to him with a delight which is all the greater precisely because of his insults" (269). As a matter of fact, Fontan is one of the vices Nana must have, "Il devenait son vice, qu’elle payait, son besoin, dont elle ne pouvait se passer, sous l’aiguillon des gifles" (Nana, 253). Nana, the femme fatale, feeds off the fatal, evil, and deadly effects of her enticing sexuality.

Death - No Other Choice

Because beauty will not sustain Nana through death, her one true fear, she understands, with horror, that she will not eternally be beautiful and therefore powerful. Upon recognition of this, Nana becomes quite frightened:

On est laid, quand on est mort...Une glace l’arrêta, elle s’oublia comme autrefois, dans le spectacle de sa nudité. Mais la vue de sa gorge, de ses hanches et de ses cuisses, redoublait sa peur (Nana, 356).
Her fear of death was genuine and warranted, as her death was only a matter of time. Her daily living was eating her alive like a virus of desire that was inherent in Nana’s body. This beautiful courtesan leaves this world, dying of smallpox - l’inconnu de désir:

Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui monter au visage et l’avait pourri (Nana, 440).

Bernheimer explains the results of Nana’s diseased life of desire:

The virus transmits desire; desire furthers the circulation of the virus, which is a disease of the blood, a curdling and decomposition of the blood; ...Nana’s corpse figures the end of desire’s infection (Bernheimer, 218).

As Nana dies it seems that all inside her, from corruption to perversion, comes forth to her face, representing boils of self-destruction from lavish, sexual living.

So that order may be returned to society, this powerful femme fatale must die. She is too powerful to keep on living. The mouche d’or "becomes her final and most spectacular victim" (Zola’s Crowds, 167). Auerbach speaks of the dying fallen woman perfectly in Woman and the Demon:

The fallen woman must die at the end of her
story,... the only honorable symbol of her fall's transforming power. Death does not simply punish or obliterate the fallen woman: its ritual appearance alone does her justice (161).

Along the same lines, Showalter gives another perspective which speaks of death as the "escape from confining traditions" and a "heroic embrace of independence and a symbolic resurrection into myth" (136). Nana’s only escape from gender and class structure seems to be her death, which compounds her mythical traits.

In Nana, death becomes what Schor speaks of in "Mother’s Day: Zola’s Women" as "the death of sex as a tragic, exalted theme," and goes even further to say that Nana may be the death of tragedy itself" (17). As stated previously, Nana must die so that order may be restored. Why is a prostitute such a threat to the societal order?

Prostitution, a Class Structure, a Threat or a Perversion?

According to Madame Hugon, the aristocratic mother of two of Nana’s lovers, Nana was not only a threat to society, but a menace and a complete corruptor of the familial structure. After Nana ruined one of her sons, Philippe, (caught stealing money for Nana), Madame Hugon rushed over to Nana’s home to reclaim her sons (Nana had also corrupted her younger son, Georges). Upon arrival, the distraught
mother walked into Nana’s home, only to find that Georges tried to kill himself (he later dies) because Nana would not marry him. All this mother could utter to this “wretched whore” was, “Ah! Vous nous avez fait bien du mal!... Vous nous avez fait bien du mal!” (Nana, 396). The courtesan lives “as a parasite on marriage, sucking from it all passion and joy and thereby destroying it” (Moses, 183). Madame Hugon and Nana show the two contradictory images of the women in a zolien novel, “de mères sublimes...[et] d’antithèse vivante de la blondeur perverse d’une Nana” (Mitterand, 8).

This image of women existed in the nineteenth century because of unequal wages as factory workers and maids, and their inability to divorce, which doomed them to prostitution. In French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, Moses explains a metaphor used by Flora Tristan, one of the most celebrated of all nineteenth-century feminists:

“Tristan, ..., frequently used this metaphor of the prostitute to symbolize the oppression of women.”... and about prostitutes, “[as they were all] required to sell themselves for money and all were unable to rehabilitate their fallen status” (111).

Does this “fallen status” land within the realms of the proletariat, or is it so low that the prostitutes live completely outside the class structure? Auerbach responds to this question by referring to Victorian imagery in Woman
No doubt the Victorian imagination isolated the fallen woman pitilessly from a social context, preferring to imagine her as destitute and drowned prostitute or errant wife cast beyond the human community, because of her uneasy implications for wives who stayed home (159).

McNay expresses a similar viewpoint in Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self, "prostitutes were regarded as fallen women and a threat to social stability" (43). Nana and her "co-workers" were obviously a threat to society and outside the norm, as is reflected in the country scene, where the carriages of courtesans and their "friends" went for a day trip. Meeting the respectable people who were on foot made for a clear vision of what is meant by class prejudice:

Les rires avaient cessé dans les voitures; des figures se tournaient, curieusement. On se dévisagea, au milieu d'un silence que coupait seul le trot cadencé des chevaux. Dans la première voiture, Maria Blond et Tantan Néné, renversées comme des duchesses, les jupes bouffant par-dessus les roues, avaient des regards dédaigneux pour ces femmes honnêtes qui allaient à pied. Ensuite Gaga emplissait toute une banquette, noyant près d'elle la Faloise, dont on ne voyait que le nez inquiet. Puis, venaient Caroline Héquet avec
Labordette. Lucy Stewart avec Mignon et ses fils, et tout au bout, occupant une victoria en compagnie de Steiner, Nana, qui avait devant elle, sur un strapontin, ce pauvre mignon de Zizi [Georges], fourrant ses genoux dans les siens (Nana, 179).

All of those wishing not to be seen, such as Georges, tried to hide from the aristocratic group's sight. All the courtesans appeared as regal as possible, flaunting their wealth and high living to the haughty high-class snobs.

What is the difference between these two classes of women? Zola would like us to believe the environmental reasons for the courtesans dismissal from high-class society. Bernheimer quotes Jules Michelet's definition of hysteria, one of Zola's mentors, in Figures of Ill Repute, "women are, like Nana, nervously deranged [a perversion]. The brain is not directly attacked but it swims, it floats, as a result of the enervation of the interior organs" (205). From a scientific, biological point of view, Nana is a perversion, bred from the excessive repression of the upper classes, and oppression of the class structures. Trask, in Eros and Power, views the class systems within the context of morality, "If morality is seen as the repressive 'conscience' of the individual, then 'perversions' are indeed immoral" (9). As an immoral person according to the status quo, Nana is placed outside the social class system, becoming a threat to patriarchy.
Nana - a Threat to Patriarchy?

Nana as a threat has been well-established in the previous section, but how can she be a threat in a patriarchal world? Some writers of feminism, like Diamond and Quinby in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, recognize that "Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (72). Because the men in Nana’s life see her as an object, they give her power through their desire for her body. Diamond and Quinby continue with the connection of how a woman becomes trained by patriarchal social norms to see herself from a male's viewpoint, "This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy" (81). Nana chooses to contradict these patriarchal norms in order to control her own life, and in this she discovers the power of her disobedience. Within this obedience one can find the liaison of patriarchy and the oppression of women. Therefore, the opposite of patriarchy would be one who fought against this self-surveillance by "seeking self-ownership sought to confirm her right to withhold her body, to make it her own property and to control its value" (Stange, 197). This explains the power Nana has over men. She is a threat to patriarchy, "because of her function in stimulating artistic strategies to control and dispel her fantasmatic threat to male mastery" (Bernheimer, 2).
Returning to the objectifying of the subject (Nana), one realizes that in order to regain control over social norms, patriarchy must not recognize Nana, the *femme fatale*, as a class structure - thus, empowering her by giving her a place in their patriarchy. Nana has chosen to dismiss the patriarchal structuring, thus beating the system and regaining power by coming from outside the social structure. As Trask says in *Eros and Power*:

The Self under Western patriarchy is an objectifying, acquisitive ego visualizing and using the Other as extensions of the Self. Here, the Self is understood as male, the Other as female (87).

Nana contradicts patriarchy by visualizing her body from her viewpoint only, avoiding all outside appraisals.

The Courtesan, the High-Class/Powered Prostitute

Liberation through the denial of patriarchal norms, gave Nana, the courtesan, more liberty to move freely about society as a recognized figure than a simple prostitutes would have. Nana was able to roam freely with Vandeuvres in the private enclosure at the Grand Prix horse race. "...Vous ferez un tour. J’ai justement sur moi une entrée pour dame" (335). Bernheimer defines the courtesan as, "a prostitute who associates with men of wealth and prestige, is often kept by one or more of these men, and is a public figure,"
often ostentatiously so" (7). The courtesans of the latter half of the nineteenth century were considered "the decadence of the haute bourgeoisie and aristocracy" (Baguley, 163). They appeared to be placed upon a pedestal, even admired by society, just as Nana was admired by all during her grand show of glamour:

Elle régna tout de suite parmi les plus chères. Ses photographies s'étaient aux vitrines, on la citait dans les journaux. Quand elle passait en voiture sur les boulevards, la foule se retournait et la nommait, avec l'émotion d'un peuple saluant sa souveraine (Nana, 296).

It would seem that "men have created her to satisfy needs they cannot satisfy within the sterile marriages they themselves have created" (Moses, 183). Perhaps it was Zola's goal to "protest against the false picture of vice conveyed by sentimental versions of the courtesan" (Bernheimer, 219). Portraying Nana in her life's high and low moments, Zola reminds the reader that this courtesan's lifestyle was a fragile one.

Nana's Empowerment through Male Characteristics

During the high points in Nana's life, Nana related well to power, habitually a "masculine quality." Defined with objectifying adjectives, she lost all human limits and
characteristics, enabling her to have more freedom than any typical nineteenth-century woman. The adjectives used, however, seem to all take on a masculine quality. Is Nana a masculine woman, or a female representing a new mode in the nineteenth-century female societal norm?

Woman and "masculine power" can mix more easily if the woman takes on male characteristics. A more feminine woman, defined as the "weaker" sex has more difficulties through inequality, than women like Nana. A good example of this is in Nana's lesbian relations with Satin. When the two are portrayed together, Nana appears to be the more masculine of the two, and Satin the good little wife; "Puis, elle [Satin] aida Nana à se déshabiller, elle eut autour d'elle des airs de petite femme prévenante et soumise" (Nana, 255). The inequality of women and their inferiority to men is based on two notions:

Firstly, women's bodies are marked as inferior by being compared with men's bodies, according to male standards (homme manqué), and secondly, biological functions are conflated with social characteristics (McNay, 17).

When Nana's body becomes dominating in the social battlefield, she becomes the "masculinized feminine" (Bernheimer, 208). It is as though through the emancipation of the feminine, her sex is masculinized.

In her social roles, especially in her sexuality, Nana has male attributes. Wanting to fight a duel with Madame
Robert over Satin displays Nana's masculinity full reign: "Elle parlait de souffleter madame Robert: un jour même, elle rêva de duel" (Nana, 302). Using her wretched sexuality as a masculinized power tool relates directly to guilt and sin, "si la sexualité est maudite, c'est sur la femme-instrument-du-péché que sera projeté le sentiment masculin de culpabilité" (Jennings, 54). Jennings continues this concept of the masculine femme fatale further when discussing a situation that is similar to the lesbian relationship between Nana and Satin:

Le rôle dans les rapports amoureux est l'inverse de celui reconnu par la suprématie masculine. et son agressivité, son ardeur à exprimer et à imposer ses désire, contribuent à faire d'elle une femme fatale (67).

Homosexuality created an escape from patriarchal society, a haven for women where men could not enter. By withholding themselves sexually from men and regiving to each other, the prostitutes were able to exercise the "eternal rights of women ... insisting that she has a self and that she owns that self" (Stange, 209). Through homosexuality, Nana regained possession of her self.

As Bernheimer states:

Nana's lesbianism constitutes a breach within her desire that erodes and decomposes the biological model of sexuality, the vital basis of the patriarchal social
order (226).

Finding refuge in a form of love that does not exist in the world of men, Nana experiences some form of relief. She chooses this life over men, for instance, forcing Muffat out while choosing to spend the night with Satin:

...elle le laissa partir. Il venait d’apercevoir Satin, allongée dans son attente silencieuse. Alors, il regarda les deux femmes, et, n’insistant plus, se soumettant, il descendit. La porte du vestibule n’était pas refermée, que Satin empoigna Nana par la taille, dansa, chanta (315).

Giving up on Nana, Muffat leaves while understanding that this is not a place where he has any control, or say. Jennings, in L’Éros et la femme chez Zola, clarifies this situation as "une forme de rébellion contre l’esclavage de la prostitution" (41).

In a sense, this raging lesbian world represents the war of the sexes that is waging throughout Nana. Schor recognizes this war in Zola’s Crowds:

To fail to measure the depth not only of Nana’s contempt for men but also of her love for women is to overlook the open war between men and women waged from page one onward. The battle of the sexes is a difficult cliche to renew, but Zola rises to the challenge (91).

Schor uses the analogies of crowds of men separated from
women throughout the novel to show the extremes between male and female that Nana represents. At the end of the novel, the death scene shows the extremes very clearly through the two separate crowds. The women attend to Nana in the bedroom, and the suitors and male friends of Nana wait downstairs, afraid of the disease, the disease so easily recognizable as desire’s ends.

The masculinized woman in Nana, oftentimes clichéd as lesbian and also seen as a transvestite, reiterates and contradicts the social norm that patriarchy has so easily defined for sexuality. Transvestitism played its role in Nana, pushing the limits of her external societal class: "Puis, sous un déguisement d’homme, c’étaient des parties dans des maisons infâmes, des spectacles de débauche dont elle amusait son ennui" (Nana, 404). Bonnie Zimmerman compares the child becoming a woman to the masculine woman:

Along with the immature child afraid of womanhood and the masculine woman, both inspired by sexology theories, the predatory monster became a common lesbian stereotype persisting to the present day (5).

Even the dressing up of George showed Nana’s enjoyment with crossing the sexual lines with appearance – not only of herself, but of her mates as well: "Oh! le mignon, qu’il est gentil en petite femme!" (Nana, 164). Nana, a living perversion, fights the sexology theories with her masculine and lesbian lifestyle.
Pure womanhood, a mold of perfect femininity created by the ideas of patriarchy, considers woman as the model female citizen. Nana defied all these notions, though it is questionable whether it was because of her hereditary ties to class, as Zola would dictate, or whether it was because she would have lost power had she tried to remain pure within a patriarchal construct. Nana craved this pure life every so often throughout the novel. From the beginning of the novel when she "bought back" her son, Louiset, from a mid-wife in the country, to her trip into the country, to her try at the pure life with Fontan, Nana displayed some "motherly" traits. Finding this "motherhood" binding, almost enslaving, Nana has trouble keeping Louiset with her. Therefore, in order to continue her lifestyle, Louiset grows up with his Aunt Madame Lerat.

The possibility of such a perfectly pure woman is
practically impossible, but the ideal was alive and well. Contradicting the femme fatale image mentioned above, the "good woman was fulfilled through her reproductive capacities and through the nurturing of her children" (McNay, 31). As long as women carried out "the responsibilities they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society" (History of Sexuality, 147), they were upholding the expectations of society.

The characteristics of the pure woman are passive, dependent and maternal - generally traits associated with the feminine. The opposite, the mother's jouissance, is not feasible in Zola's world, this is why he created Nana, so that he could release the sexuality of woman into the world - the only way plausible being through the life of a femme fatale. This maternal figure explains why man is so distant from woman, this "dark continent" (Breaking the Chain, 29). Man can never know the life of a mother, he can never feel the physical and emotional attachment a mother has to her child. Schor associates Zola with Freud in Breaking the Chain by suggesting that:

By locking woman into motherhood, Zola rejoins Freud, for whom the only so-called normal femininity is the one defined by marriage and motherhood. ...first and foremost physically and psychically (32).

The genuine mother of a family is no woman of the world;
she is almost as much of a recluse as a nun in her convent.

The domestic woman lives the life of an "angel" equating womanhood with domestic purity. Daughter, wife, and mother were the only acceptable roles. As Jennings states, "A la limite, la femme idéale est celle-qui-n’est-pas, elle est la non-femme, l’absence de l’Autre que le Moi triomphant a réussi à anéantir" (128). This goal of femme idéale was even further out of reach for Nana than it was for the typical woman because she was so involved in the world of prostitution - the exact opposite of the cult of pure womanhood. When exploring the pious life in the country she felt that "elle était née pour vivre sage," her friends rebelled, knowing Nana's true identity; "elle [Nana] rasa tout le monde par ses bons sentiments, un accès d’honnêté bête, avec des idées d’éducation religieuse pour Louiset et tout un plan de bonne conduite pour elle" (Nana, 166, 137). Schor explains in "Mother’s Day: Zola’s Women" the ideals of the femme idéale within this cult:

The cult of woman as earth-mother, as angel of the hearth, hypocritically masks her relegation to a subordinate role in society, one strictly determined by the political and economic changes ushered in by the French Revolution (11).

Nana, although entranced by the pious life of these woman, remained the contradiction in pure social female constructs. The subordinate role of chastity and piousness, 13
ignorance and weakness, and the repression of sexuality in the control of women’s bodies, restrained most women from changing their roles. Nana, however, came from the other side, unable to change her role because of her already sexualized self in a prostitute’s world.

Some women in Nana, originally involved in the cult, such as the Countess Sabine, managed to break from the normative rules. As she winds up having an affair with Fauchery, she creates a rift in the system’s values instilled for woman. Her husband, Count Muffat (one of Nana’s most adoring lovers), upon first learning of her disobedience threatens to slap the man’s face and then to take her to court, “Je vais souffleter cet homme”..."Je plaiderai, j’ai une preuve” (Nana, 361). Nana talks him out of it, explaining that this would merely disrupt his family life even more. Not all women of the nineteenth century were so lucky. The control of women’s bodies, stemming from their hysterization and medicalization which were covered in chapter two, through the repression of their sexuality, was one means for patriarchy to continue along the lines of current social norms, as Madame Hugon does. Any part or characteristic of woman that appeared sexual, drew her away from the Cult of True Womanhood. In Nana, the "red voluptuous piece of furniture stands for the countess’s [Countess Sabin] repressed sexuality" (Zola’s Crowds, 100). Trask feels that "this repression is anchored in the sexual
understructure which has twisted both sexuality and love into monstrous forms of oppression" (94). Thus, the woman who wishes to remain "normal" in Zola's world must refrain from sexuality altogether, or else be deemed monstrous. The problem, however, is that this repression leads to perversion; "by perverting sexual instincts through savage repression in the interests of [patriarchal] domination" (Trask, 100), a woman cannot exercise her sexual freedom for fear of being rusted. So, where does all this leave Nana in terms of being a mother?

Nana, a Mother, too?

In spite of all these sexual perversions, and normative-breaking actions, Nana continues to recognize her son. Although he is rarely around, Louise remains in Nana's mind (though not all the time), and sometimes in her public life. Bernheimer states, "she [Nana] is the neglectful mother of a sickly child, pregnancy appears abnormal to her, and she gives all her time to desire's deviant pleasures" (216), however Nana still feels a sort of motherly bond to this boy, though very rarely.

To Nana pregnancy seemed a body's betrayal:

...elle avait une continuelle surprise, comme dérangée dans son sexe; ça faisait donc des enfants, même lorsqu'on ne voulait plus et qu'on employait ça à
Lee Quinby looks at the rejection of motherhood as a form of resistance that fits in Nana’s situation also:

This yearning [evasion of subjectivity of motherhood in the nexus of alliance and sexuality] may be understood as a form of resistance to women’s subordination in a misogynistic society, but it is a resistance that turns back on itself, destroying not misogyny but the woman who suffers it ("The Subject of Memoirs," 312).

Her resistance is once again that of the scorpion who stings itself. Rejection of this pure and pious bodily function is another form of rejection of the patriarchal norm. Stange states that "by separating sex from reproduction, appeared to threaten the family structure that provided most middle-class women their only social standing and economic security" (204). By Nana knowing her sexuality, and not her motherly functions (such as pregnancy), Nana defies the family structure.

Having a miscarriage, Nana does not have to worry about a new child, but she still verbally discloses a love for little Louiset; this love is merely with words, however. Nana rarely shows any maternal love for the child, it appears more like a crise de maternité, turning to
motherhood only in her times of crisis, not when Louiset needs her: "Mais ce qui acheva de fondre le coeur de la jeune femme, ce fut l'arrivée de Louiset. Sa crise de maternité eut la violence d'un coup de folie" (Nana, 173).

A concern, or almost a toy, of hers, though not a precedent, Louiset is "bought back" from the wet nurse that has taken care of him because of Nana's new found fame:

Mais le gros chagrin de Nana était son petit Louis, un enfant qu'elle avait eu à seize ans et qu'elle laissait chez sa nourrice, dans un village, aux environs de Rambouillet. Cette femme réclamait trois cents francs pour rendre Louiset. Prise d'une crise d'amour maternel, depuis sa dernière visite à l'enfant, Nana se désespérait de ne pouvoir réaliser un projet passé à l'idée fixe, payer la nourrice et mettre le petit chez sa tante, madame Lerat, aux Batignolles, où elle irait le voir tant qu'elle voudrait (Nana, 37).

Bringing Louiset closer to her made him more accessible to Nana; whenever Nana wanted him around, wanted to play with him, she could easily arrange it.

Further on in the story when Nana travels to her new country home, La Mignotte, she expounds on her maternal love for Louiset: "De Paris à Orléans, en wagon, elle ne parla que de ça, les yeux humides, mêlant les fleurs, les oiseaux et son enfant dans une soudaine crise de maternité" (Nana, 143). In many situations Nana finds herself pulled towards
this child, barely known to her, to fill a need within Nana's motherly crises.

A maternal crisis defines well Nana's bursts of motherhood. During the Grand Prix horse race, Nana brings Louiset along, but remembers his presence just as quickly as she forgets. In a fit of joy, Nana remembers her son, "Alors, Nana se souvint de Louiset, qu'elle oubliait derrière elle" (332). But she just as soon forgets him in her excitement of the race: "Bordenave faillit mettre le pied sur Louiset, que sa mère oubliait" (344). Claiming motherhood every so often gave Nana the illusion of normalcy in a mother's life. She even had special family visit days where Muffat could not intrude, "Nana réservait ses dimanches pour la famille; et ces jours-là, si Muffat l'invitait, elle refusait, avec le sourire d'une petite bourgeoise" (299). Even if others found her silly, she continued to enjoy those moments, though fleeting, of love that a mother feels for her offspring. Seeming to flow from one end of the "axis of motherhood" (Stange, 210) to the other - the "mother-woman" to the "not a mother-woman" (Stange 210), Nana lives the extremes. How the men view these extremes, however, is not as a confused woman, but as a mythical creature whom they do not understand.
Zola hedges his naturalist intentions by not completely stripping bare his subjects, by giving Nana bestial qualities of mythical proportions. As Chevral points out in *Le Naturalisme*, "le but des écrivains naturalistes est bien de construire une littérature sans mythes ni tabous" (60). Zola seems to outwit himself and fall back into the ideology of woman as myth. Through refusing man's internal instinct to incorporate the metaphysical in the form of myth into life in order to explain the unknown (here, woman), Zola seems to refuse a large part of human nature. As Peter Brooks states, "The first chapter of the novel provides, quite literally, a mise-en-scène for Nana's body, in the operetta *La Blonde Vénus*" (2):

> *Vénus parut. Nana, très grande, très forte pour ses dix-huit ans, dans sa tunique blanche de déesse, ses longs cheveux blonds simplement dénoués sur les épaules, descendit vers la rampe avec un aplomb tranquille, en riant au public* (*Nana* 18).

Her white goddess-like tunic reflects Nana's power as something other than a human. Although this is theater, Nana's popularity and power commence in this operetta.

Zola has stated that he used the theater as a metaphor of society (Chevral, 85). It appears, however, that he
loses himself in the theater, relating it too closely to Nana’s "real life" characteristics. Nana’s Venus and virgin-like qualities continue into the real world:

Lentement, elle ouvrit les bras pour développer son torse de Vénus grasse, elle ploya la taille, s’examinant de dos et de face, s’arrêtant au profil de sa gorge, aux rondeurs fuyantes de ses cuisses (Nana, 202).

Defying human nature in myth, Zola contradicts his own theories in order to portray Nana’s courtesan sexuality.

Categorizing Nana as a courtesan (femme fatale), Zola “concentrated [her] into a myth of transfiguration that glorified the woman [Zola] seemed to suppress” (Auerbach, 9). Thus, wanting to “suppress” this woman, he created a mythical creature, entrancing to all who perceive: “La salle entière vacillait, glissait à un vertige, lasse et excitée, prise de ces désirs ensommeillés de minuit qui balbutient qui fond des alcôves” (Nana, 32). As mentioned before, objectifying a woman by giving her fictional traits, here the mythical Venus, empowers her. Auerbach notes in Woman and the Demon, “woman [is] enlarged by myth [having] more in common with fictional creations than she does with living men; her fictionality is one source of the energy that aggrandizes her” (15). Lost in the world of an early Freud16 where “female jouissance remains a dead letter” (Breaking the Chain, 43), Zola faces his confusion about
woman's nature. "the spiritual essence of the universe [being] incarnate in a woman's changing nature" (Auerbach, 39). "Vénus arrivait. Un frisson remua la salle. Mana était nue. Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair" (Nana, 30). In this explosive scene, the woman/myth has become the romantic image of the woman on a pedestal. Albistur and Armogatthe in Histoire du féminisme français speak of the myth's purpose in the nineteenth century:

Sa femme mythique n'est rien d'autre qu'un instrument, indispensable pour susciter le rêve et provoquer l'extase, mais qu'on abandonne quand les désirs sont assouvis... son corps de femme renvoie à l'Idée (262).

As an instrument of virginity, the romantic image of Mana easily displays these pious qualities of the femme mythique. "Sous les fisures naturelles de ses beaux cheveux cendrés, elle avait une figure de vierge, aux yeux de velours, doux et candides" (Nana, 22). The patriarchal mode of fantasizing woman's difference is "a dream [that] eroticizes the prostitute’s body, reconstitutes it as virginal, and links it to natural purity" (Bernheimer, 220). This virginal fantasy made a man of the nineteenth century all the more drawn to her sex.
Feminine Myth as a Force of Nature

When Heinrich Mann wrote of Nana in 1915, he stated that:

it requires but a little imagination for her

[Nana] to mean more, a 'force of nature,' unaware of
the evil that she does...A cycle of vice, a cycle of
death: human agitation, magnificent like nature
(Baguley, 72).

Caught up in her exploitation of men, she whirls through
their lives, destroying them as a hurricane wipes out an
entire village. She becomes a force of nature, "a ferment
of destruction, but without wanting to, by means of her sex
alone and her strong female odor, destroying everything she
approaches" (Bernheimer, 201). These analogies to Nana all
fit the norm of nineteenth-century woman. According to
Albistur and Armogathe: "Le corps sexué de la femme
représente au contraire, le mouvement, le rythme, la
palpitation de la vie; il la met en contact avec tous les
secrets de la nature" (260). Down to the loosening of her
hair as "a symbol of woman reverting to a state of Nature,
and animal's mane" (Jullian, 108), Nana represents a strong
force of nature in the eyes of her beholden men, rampaging
their lives like a ferocious beast, but with "une
distinction nerveuse de chatte de race" (Nana, 286).

The animalistic qualities taken on by Nana emphasize
Zola's idea of naturalistic qualities. Zola's goal in writing, was to show that "l'homme porte en lui dans ses instincts primordiaux, une part de bestialité et de matérialité irrépressible" (Mitterand, '76). Baguley continues further with these ideas by comparing them to Zola's novels: "his (Zola's) characters are governed entirely by their animal appetites and are therefore incapable of making moral choices" (Baguley, '94). In trying to represent animalistic qualities in Nana, Zola turns her, distraught by a bad hereditary line, into an almost metaphysical force of nature, thus losing the original goal of defying the myth.17

Zola directly relates sex to beastiality,18 but in doing so he objectifies Nana by giving her an almost mythical power. As Jules Lemaitre remarks:

Nana is a beautiful animal with a magnificent and unwholesome body, stupid, without grace and without heart, neither evil nor good, irresistible by the sole power of her sex (Baguley, '47).

Although some of these statements are harsh, "stupid" and "without heart" being a definitively questionable matter of opinion, the simple animalistic power of her sex remains. The animalistic traits can be seen in Nana's beauty or her sex. As an animal in heat in her performance as Venus, Nana entrances and intoxicates her audience; "[elle] glissait comme une poule, dégageait autour d'elle une odeur de vie,
une toute-puissance de femme, dont le public se grisait" ... "Le rut qui montait d’elle, ainsi que d’une bête en folie, s’était épandu toujours davantage, emplissant la salle" (Nana, 25, 21). Her animalistic beauty glows when during the Grand Prix horse race, the spectators become enthralled in the race of Nana, the horse. It becomes difficult to decipher who is being acclaimed, the horse or Nana; "Alors, Nana, debout sur le siège de son landau, trandie, crut que c’était elle qu’on acclamait" (Nana, 349). Zola traps himself in his own theories, caught up in the mythical associations of animal/woman/goddess.

From Animal to Monster

Nana as the elegant animal easily becomes the beastly monster, a devourer of souls and a devourer of men, "Nana souriait toujours, mais d’un sourire aigu de mangeuse d’hommes" (Nana, 30). The amazing, almost funny contradiction with Nana is that while her sex seems a destructive beast of mythic proportions, Zola seems to want his readers to like her. Bernheimer expresses these same sentiments:

Zola seems to encourage us to like Nana, a kind of pristine creature, childlike, robust, playful, "bonne enfant," while he solicits our horrified disgust for her carnivorous vagina (201).
In Praz's terms, "sexual cannibalism" (205) seems to be Mana's means to a macabre end.

Hemmings compares Mana to a monster:

[Nana] was standing alone in the midst of the heaped-up treasures of her house, with a nation of men at her feet. Like those monsters of ancient fable whose fearful lair was strewn with bones, she set her feet on skulls (Baguley, 99).

Slowly devouring one man, sometimes more than one, at a time, Nana reiterates all the monstrous notions a pure and pious aristocrat nineteenth-century woman would envision.

Other mythical monsters, such as the Sphinx, seem to represent the female monster of sexuality. Schor speaks of the sphinx in Breaking the Chain as "the riddle of femininity ... intimately linked with the enigma of sexual difference" (186). Similar to "Khnopff's 'sphinx-woman'" and "Rog's clever engravings," which are the "anti-thesis of Symbolism" (Jullian, 104), Schor's sphinx defines Nana through beastly, sexual analogies.

Il songeait à son ancienne horreur de la femme, au monstre de l'Ecriture, lubrique, sentant le fauve. ... il y avait da la bête. C'était la bête d'or: inconsciente comme une force, et dont l'odeur seule gâtait le monde (Nana, 203).

In Muffat's eyes, Nana became his sin, a golden beast of great sexual powers, emotionally and physically controlling
The Machination of Woman

A man-eating beast easily turns into an unstoppable machine, a consuming fire, in the eyes of a society watching as a woman mechanically, seemingly devoid of guilt, continues to ruin the lives of many a man. Barthes explains Nana in a short essay in *Nana* in *Critical Essays on Emile Zola* as:

an instrument, an explosive or corrosive mechanism, mercilessly placed in the society of the Second Empire, fulfilling her task of destruction without any possible redemption (Baguley, 91).

Appearing to have no conscience or soul at times, Nana continues en route, relentlessly destroying men along the way, to an unquestionable end of death; "Elle dévore tout comme un grand feu, les vols de l’agio, les gains du travail" (Nana, 406).

Brooks relates another interesting association of the sex of Nana and the machination of her body:

Her sex is all the more powerful in that its mechanism remains hidden. More than a machine, it is a motor, a steam engine, as all the imagery of heat, hot vapors, and pressures associated with Nana suggests (27).

Through the rapid deterioration of everyone and thing in
Nana's path, she quickly ran out of room in the grand city of Paris. Nana moved to another country, supposedly to Cairo. However, she returned to her home to die:

Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l'avait pourri (Nana, 440).

Nana finally reached her limit in life, slowly deteriorating, her beauty eaten away by the pox on her flesh, reflecting the horrors her life had spewed forth.
1.1. This concept of Nana as non-human will be covered later in the work, for example with the episode of a horse named Nana at the Grand Prix horse races.

2. The care of the self does not entail the care of the soul. Therefore, this definition does not include the self as soul, but only that of physical self-preservation.

3. "Biasing starres" is a an old translation from the first Chorus of the Chephorae of Aeschylus.

4. Sawicki continues along this line in Disciplining Foucault. "Hence, they [radical feminists] view the struggles of women as a sex/class as the key to human liberation" (19).

5. Much of the salon art matched the "increasing visibility of the courtesan as a social type" (Brooks, 15). The more visible a courtesan became in daily life, the more she become enhanced as a social enigma.

6. It is interesting to note, here, that evidence suggests that, "In his youth was imbued with the myth of the whore redeemed through love - he apparently tried to 'save' a certain prostitute named Berthe with whom he lived in 1860 - 1861" (Bernheimer, 219).

7. Schor asks a pertinent question here, "What is the fate reserved for a character who is both female and in a position of power?" (Zola's Crowds, 167). The answer lies only in death so that the social norm that the patriarchy has instilled can continue on in a normal fashion.

8. Schor feels that Zola's woman wants "to be a man, or rather, that not wanting to recognize sexual difference, castration, Zola remains mired in the denial of Otherness that is male narcissism" (Breaking the Chain, 32).

9. Homosexuality does exist in a man's world also, of course, but in Nana and in the prostitutes' world, the focus, here, is on lesbian love as an escape from patriarchy.

10. Sexology is defined as "the study of sex or of the interaction of the sexes esp. among human beings" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary).
11. Bernheimer relates the causes of prostitution as seen by Zola:
   ...instinctual and innate...they list most often such
determining causes as a lubricous temperament, and
inordinate love of pleasure, a hereditary predisposition
to debauchery. ...prostitutes are not so much victims of
deranged social order as they are agents of organic
derangement (210).

12. Quotes will be given in defense of this comment in the
following sections.

13. The New York Female Moral Reform Society of the 19th
century saw that the 'True Womanhood':
   had to assert her right to act and to extend her domestic
   power to public realms. As [Caroll Smith-L Rosenberg
   points out, when the Society’s members spoke about 'True
   Womanhood' this was not a rationalization of a male-
   constructed class system, but rather a condemnation of
   that system (McNay, 43).

14. Schor in Breaking the Chain recognizes the dual sexes
characteristics when speaking of the "network of ignorance"
for women and the men as "forms of prestigious knowledge"
(36).

15. Gaillard speaks of Zola’s desire to refuse the metaphysical
side of man in "Le Soi et l’Autre: Le retour de la bête
humaine":
   En principe le savoir se constitue en refusant la
   tradition imaginaire (toutes les solutions archaïques:
   mythiques, religieuses, poétiques apportées aux grandes
   questions que l’homme se pose), en fait il l’utilise
   (97).
   The question here is even while using them, does he get lost
   in them?

16. In Freud’s earlier years, woman’s sexuality was considered
only in the context of male anatomy with theories of the
phallic and the lack of within the female body. Schor
continues along these lines in the context of female
jouissance, "woman exists beyond or beneath the pleasure
principle, in the margins of the page of love" (Breaking the
Chain, 43).

17. It is interesting to note a theory of Hemmings, implying "a
latent dread of sex in Zola, manifesting itself in Nana"
(Baguley, 98).

18. This thought is supported by Mitterand on page 95 of Zola
   et le Naturalisme.
19. Nana, interestingly, speaks of the "monstre" (234) when portraying Laure, the owner of the lesbian restaurant frequented by many prostitutes - a link to the lesbian, monstrous qualities of the *femme fatale*.

20. Jullian in *Dreamers of Decadence* defines well the zolien antithesis of Symbolism quite well: "he [Zola] swells lovingly on sordid detail and vulgarizes the Baudelairean dreams" (104).

21. These analogies, "representing passivity and powerlessness on the one hand, and monstrosity and chaos on the other" (Martin, 18), became a source for philosophical and political debate among the male turn-of-the-century population.
Conclusion

As a prostitute bound to this "career" because of her biological and environmental background, Nana found herself angry at the societal norms set by the patriarchy that seemed to limit her recurring desires and crises for a typical woman's life, one of monogamy and motherhood. Representing a victim of the nineteenth-century Parisian world, Nana reflected the patriarchal limitations placed on proletarian woman. Because of these limitations, Nana sought revenge by utilizing her sexual powers as a high-class courtesan to control and ruin people, thrusting her anger back on the society that refrained her from changing her fallen status.

By showing how Zola portrayed this victimized woman through his use of inhuman characteristics, this thesis used his theories "to show the machinery of ... intellectual and sensory manifestations, under the influences of heredity and environment" (The Experimental Novel, chapter I). Zola created a perversion of society in Nana in order to biologically define and represent the prostitutional world of the late nineteenth century. In his treatment of prostitution he created an almost "double vision of woman's sexual nature that he inherited from contemporary naturalism" (Bernheimer, 202). However, Zola's use of these inhuman traits, described in this thesis by myth, the
machine, the monster, the beast and other forces of nature, seemed to stray from his goals of "demythifying" the human. Non-human traits were a common outlet for explaining the mystifying attributes of the woman by nineteenth-century patriarchy. As Auerbach notes, Nana:

seems to enlightened minds a pitiable monster, created by the neurosis of a culture that because it feared female sexuality and aggression enshrined a respectably sadistic cautionary tale punishing them both (157).

Zola, however, was not supposed to need these mythical outlets for naturalist novels. Identifying Nana as something that was not "real" seems to have defeated his goal. Perhaps if he would have remained more on a biological path, incorporating more characteristics relating to hysteria, he would have been able to maintain his naturalist goals.

Many may not be able to find pity for this destructive prostitute who wreaked havoc on many lives, but when considered from the prostitute's viewpoint, the proletarian lives whom she avenged were just as miserable as the havoc she brought her aristocratic counterparts. As a prostitute, Nana threatened the aristocratic lifestyle as she was the outlet for adultery, "[she] represent[ed] ... a potentially disruptive or socially unstabilized energy that may threaten, directly or implicitly, the organization of society" (Tanner, 3). As shown in this paper, the femme
fatale, Nana, destroyed all that was in her path while questioning her place in the societal norm, knowing that she remained outside the recognizable standards in the cult of pure womanhood.

Deprived of acceptance by society throughout her life, Nana was the perfect model to represent a battlefield of power outside the alliance's norms. Not being recognized as a part of society and her movement within societal circles enabled Nana to utilize her powerful sexuality in the form of sex and her body - not only to monopolize their lives, but to ruin them, down to their last financial and familial thread of stability. Her power as a perversion of society allowed her to roam from proletariat prostitute to aristocratic courtesan, escaping the law through her manipulation of patriarchy.

Zola's definitions of late nineteenth century came to life in Nana, within the social circles of Paris. From the aristocratic corrupt lifestyles of Count Muffat to the pure woman such as Madame Hugon, Nana highlighted the environment of the era, using Nana to display the strict lines of class structure that hindered each individual in the Naturalist period. The issue of whether or not Nana can be considered a naturalist novel will forever be debated, but as long as naturalism remains in literary circles, Zola's theories and fashion of writing will stay alive.
Bibliography


"Eugenics." Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.


“Sexology.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.


