Physiological Metaphors of Psychological Suffering in Maxence Van der Meersch's *Invasion 14*

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Published in 1935 and a contender for the Prix Goncourt that same year, Maxence Van der Meersch's *Invasion 14* deals with the experiences of the civilian population during the German occupation of northern France between October 1914 and October 1918. *Invasion 14* is one of the rare French literary works that focuses on noncombatants and their struggle to survive in the face of disease, starvation, and forced labor during the First World War. Indeed, until recently, historian John Horne notes, "[S]auf dans les régions atteintes (en Belgique, dans le nord-est de la France et ailleurs), où on en garde un souvenir douloureux, l'on en vient à nier la réalité des violences contre les civils. Les soldats sont les victimes iconiques du conflit." In *Invasion 14*, Van der Meersch creates a multitude of parallel and occasionally intersecting storylines of farmers, factory workers, merchants, prisoners of war, resistance members, and even a Catholic priest—some sixty characters in all—essentially those that historian Annette Becker has dubbed the "oubliés de la Grande Guerre" (14), to convey the diversity of civilian experiences. What has been neglected in previous studies of the novel is the mind-body connection that is the foundation for Van der Meersch's portrayal of those private citizens whose lives were destroyed by the cataclysm of war. I will argue that the physiological ailments with which the main characters of *Invasion 14* present point to psychological anguish, making them "idioms of distress," to borrow Lilian R. Furst's phrasing (x). The maladies I will examine here are psychosomatic in that, as Furst says, they are "the translation of the [psychological] distress into a physical symptom or symptoms, that is, its projection into the body as paralysis, deafness, blindness, muteness, or such lesser symptoms as headaches, palpitations, or gastrointestinal disturbances" (xi). Inspired by the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, Van der Meersch also borrows from the doctrines of physiognomy—the pseudoscience of "reading" the body and face in order to discern character—in creating the main characters of *Invasion 14*. I will further argue that Van der Meersch develops his characters through a subtle code combining symptoms of psychosomatic illness with the precepts of physiognomy.

Born in Roubaix in 1907, Van der Meersch was a resident of the city for the duration of the German occupation. While his own memories of the war were the foundation for his narrative, he also conducted interviews with other survivors and reviewed archival records in order to accurately represent the period. W. Brian Newsome observes that "[d]espite his extensive research—or perhaps because of it—Van der Meersch continued to see the

occupation through the eyes of the terrified child he was in 1914" ("Occupation" 61). In his essay "Pourquoi j'ai écrit *Invasion 14*," Van der Meersch wrote that he had had "cette chance providentielle de connaître personnellement les héros marquants du drame. J'ai recueilli leurs récits, leurs témoignages oraux et écrits. Et puis, ces heures d'agonie, je puis bien dire que je les ai vécues moi-même. L'atmosphère, l'ambiance, je la portais en moi" (60-61). Despite Van der Meersch's efforts to be faithful to the experiences of the civilian population, Marc Dujardin cautions that *Invasion 14* is primarily a literary piece and not a historical account. Van der Meersch, he observes, "[a] souvent altéré la vérité par grossissement, charge ou déformation. Il a déformé pour mieux porter témoignage. S'il fut un témoin, on ne peut pas le considérer comme un miroir" (257-58). In short, as Newsome suggests, *Invasion 14* may best be termed a work of "fictional truth" ("Maxence" xiv).

Van der Meersch (1907-51) is the author of thirteen novels—most of which were written between 1932 and 1943—and four major non-fiction works. He enjoyed critical and popular success early on, beginning with his first novel, *La maison dans la dune* (1932). That novel, dealing with tobacco smugglers in the Nord and Belgium and based on a case from his short-lived career as a lawyer, has been adapted for the screen three times, most recently in 1988. Van der Meersch was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 1936 for *L'empreinte du Dieu* and the Grand prix du roman de l'Académie française in 1943 for *Corps et âmes*. Most of his novels are set in and around his hometown of Roubaix and feature working-class characters. One notable example is his trilogy *La fille pauvre* (1934-55), which was inspired by his wife Thérèze's hard-scrabble life. Raised by atheist parents, Van der Meersch converted to Catholicism as an adult, an experience he recounted in *L'élu* (1937). Spirituality is a central theme of many of his novels, but his views were at times provocative. *La petite sainte Thérèse* (1947), Newsome notes, made clergy "bristle," because he portrayed the saint "as a flawed individual whose saintliness lay not in a form of holy perfection but in acknowledgement of her weaknesses, and who was thus redeemed primarily by faith in God's grace rather than faith, hope, and charity" ("Maxence" xxi). Christian Morzewski observes that, in recent years, Van der Meersch's *œuvre*—which he characterizes as a "régionalisme misérabiliste" (6)—is "proprement *illisible* pour le lecteur de Camus, Malraux, Mauriac ou même Bernanos" (8; emphasis in original). Morzewski further notes that the views expressed in the novels, in particular those on women's place in society and on homosexuality, are "difficilement admissibles" (6) for today's reader.

For some critics, *Invasion 14* (1935) has aged better than most of Van der Meersch's work. The novel was generally favorably reviewed at the time of its publication, though some critics found the novel too violent and too dark. As Ramon Fernandez puts it, "Les amateurs d'images d'Épinal seront déçus par son livre, où les Français ne sont pas présentés sous un plus beau jour que les Allemands, je serais même tenté de dire : au contraire" (4). Contemporary critics pointed to the similarities between *Invasion 14* and Zola's novels. John Charpentier, in *Mercure de France*, declared that "M. Maxence Van der Meersch est, sans doute, de tous les romanciers de la nouvelle génération celui qui se rapproche le plus de Zola. . . . Mais — et c'est en cela qu'il se distingue de Zola et qu'il en diffère — s'il nous montre de vilaines gens, il nous en fait voir aussi d'héroïques. . . . Aussi, malgré sa violence ne peut-on pas dire que M. Van der Meersch soit un naturaliste" (142). The reviewer for *Le Matin*, writing under the pen name "Les coupe-papier," went so far as

to suggest that *Invasion 14* was superior to Zola's novels: "On a comparé Maxence Van der Meersche à Zola. S'il en a le sens des volumes et des masses, c'est avec un éclairage plus beau et plus haut moins de parti-pris. Et même le style de l'auteur, assez simple, assez ordinaire, est par instants soulevé par la force du livre, jusqu'à une épique et poignante grandeur" (4).

Before beginning the analysis of the characters in *Invasion 14*, it is important to define the terms that I will be using since Van der Meersch creates two sets of corporeal "codes." Like Balzac before him, Van der Meersch applied the principles of physiognomy as set forth by the Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater. Moreau de la Sarthe's translation of Lavater's *Essai sur la physiognomonie, destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer* (1806-09) was popular among scholars and artists in France through much of the nineteenth century (Percival 17). Balzac and George Sand were two of Lavater's enthusiasts; each owned a copy of the aforementioned *Essai sur la physiognomonie* (Rivers 105). As proof of Lavater's popularity, Melissa Percival references numerous accounts of individuals who "chose their servants and spouses according to his precepts" (15). What is more, Graeme Tytler explains that, pseudoscience or not, Lavater's theories provide novelists with the means to describe a character's inner self with an economy of words since "each part of the body contains the character and essence of the whole, and there is no incongruity between the separate parts. This is confirmed by the unique physical appearance of each human being" (66-67). For readers, of course, the challenge lies in deciphering the physiognomic code because, as Orsolya Tóth observes, "[T]he description of a character is judged in a different way, along different expectations by a reader who is familiar (or was re-familiarized) with the ideas of physiognomy" (37). Understanding the bodily signs, then, is vital to the appreciation of Van der Meersch's artistry in *Invasion 14*.

Whereas physiognomy is at best a pseudoscience, psychosomatic illness has been recognized as a medical phenomenon beginning with the physicians of ancient Greece. Historian Edward Shorter posits that the term *psychosomatic* may be applied to "any illness in which physical symptoms, produced by the action of the unconscious mind, are defined by the individual as evidence of organic disease and for which medical help is sought" (x). Nineteenth-century French novels offer numerous examples of psychosomatic illness, including Balzac's *Le lys dans la vallée*, in which monsieur de Mortsauf presents with what would today be termed "conversion symptoms." What is more, in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series, the family matriarch, Adélaïde Rougon, suffers from hysteria, the quintessential psychosomatic malady that is the source of hereditary infirmity in her descendants.

In *Invasion 14*, the case of Gaspard Fontcroix, a former grocery store owner who suffers from an "affection assez obscure de la moëlle [*sic*] épinière" which "peu à peu, lui ôtait la vue" (203), is a prime example of Van der Meersch's use of bodily indicators to signal psychological disturbances. Van der Meersch found inspiration for the case of Gaspard Fontcroix in his uncle Georges, who lost his vision then went mad (Newsome, "Maxence" x). Forced to live with his sister and her family, Gaspard is preyed upon by his brother-in-law who begrudges him the tiny rations of dry bread he consumes. His spinal affliction suggests that his very foundation—emotional as well as physiological—is compromised. Tellingly, "spinal irritation" was one among the many manifestations of psychosomatic illness recognized by health professionals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries (Shorter 35). One cannot help but think of the work of nineteenth-century French neurologist and anatomical pathologist Jean-Martin Charcot, one of the founders of modern neurology. Charcot documented cases of hysterical blindness, which he deemed a manifestation of *la grande hystérie* (King 10). In Gaspard's case, his loss of vision points to his naivety as well as to his obliviousness to anything other than a cure for his illness. His disability shuts him off from the rest of the world, leaving him "la proie de ses pensées" (208), which only exacerbates his physiological suffering. Gaspard exemplifies, then, what Mary Barbier terms "[l]a dualité du corps et de l'âme" in *Invasion 14* (87).

The mind-body association is confirmed by Gaspard's progression to full-blown psychosis when he learns of Feuillebois's death: "Il tint des discours de plus en plus véhéments à des êtres imaginaires, s'assombrit, exagéra encore ses habitudes taciturnes. Il souffrit d'intoxications, d'anthrax, de maux de reins" (218-19). The "intoxications" were not the result of infection with *bacillus anthracis* but rather the product of his fragile psyche, of which "anthrax" is the dermatological manifestation. Cutaneous anthrax—the least virulent form in humans—presents as a boil-like lesion. Anthrax here, however, likely refers to dermatitis—that is, an unspecified skin irritation—the psychosomatic illness par excellence since, as Philip D. Shenefelt and Debrah A. Shenenfelt put it, "The skin is a great projection screen onto which physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the person are constantly made visible" (208). In this way, Gaspard's psychological pain erupts through his skin.

Gaspard's physical suffering increases in direct proportion to his worries about his financial situation, which "le rongeai[en]t visiblement" (219). At the same time, "ronger" echoes the description of his crumbling spine that threatens his bodily integrity. Because he is deprived of physiological and emotional sustenance, Gaspard is eventually reduced to an animal-like state: "Il était si affamé qu'aux heures où Joséphine [sa sœur] faisait frire le saindoux et grésiller le lard pour le dîner, on le voyait trembler de désir et grelotter, les narines palpitantes et la bouche pleine d'eau" (219-20). His resemblance to a dog salivating over food suggests that his survival instinct has taken over. As his psychological crisis worsens, his emotions register in his face: "Gaspard abandonna tout, laissa voir, de plus en plus, une douleur envahissante" (221). After he suffers a psychotic break, his family has him committed to an asylum where his verbal incoherence eclipses his physiological symptoms. What is more, the somaticization of Gaspard's grief is in parallel with another storyline in the novel. While in a German prison in Rheinbach, Daniel Decraemer discovers the ability to discern his fellow prisoners' anguish: "Il semblait que la souffrance les avilît [les prisonniers], les rapprochât de la bête. lIs devenaient féroces. La faim les rendait inhumains. Le vernis de civilisation s'écaillait, laissait place aux instincts" (283-84). What is more, these two descriptions echo the observation by the mayor of Lille in October 1917, Charles Delesalle:

> Notre population, qui supporte avec une dignité exemplaire la terrible épreuve qui fondit sur elle il y aura bientôt trois ans, s'épuise littéralement. On ne rencontre que mines hâves, teints terreux, corps décharnés ; l'amaigrissement varie entre 15 et 40 kg ; les maladies sévissent nombreuses et variées, et la mortalité sera effroyable pendant l'hiver si, à la pénurie de combustible, s'ajoute celle toujours plus aiguë de l'alimentation. (qtd. in Trochon 191)

In this way, Gaspard's suffering mirrors the Darwinian struggle in which the inhabitants of occupied France were engaged during the German occupation.

Gaspard's case is a blueprint of sorts for Van der Meersch's use of physical traits as indicators of psychological characteristics. In Gaspard's friend Feuillebois, we see how Van der Meersch borrows Balzac's use of physiognomy to portray the character's emotional distress after losing his son. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau underscores the unique circumstance of the loss of a child in war: ". . . le combat signe globalement la mort des jeunes hommes : à ce titre, la guerre inverse de façon dramatique l'ordre habituel de succession des générations. En temps normal, cette cassure de la filiation, dont on sait l'importance centrale au sein de toutes les sociétés humaines, constitue un choc psychique d'une gravité exceptionnelle" (2). Feuillebois's portrait is essentially a case study in how parents grieve the loss of an adult child. Marc-L. Bourgeois states that "[l]es parents âgés ayant perdu un enfant adulte sont beaucoup plus traumatisés et présentent un deuil chronique avec perturbations psychiques, somatiques, etc." (17). This, as we shall see, is precisely what Feuillebois experiences.

Feuillebois is a teacher and patriot who models for his students "son propre évangile" (205), formulated during the Franco-Prussian war, which consists of "Patrie [et] Revanche" (205). At the start of *la Grande Guerre*, he was "un grand gaillard bilieux, le teint olivâtre, la carrure imposante, toujours vêtu d'une ample jaquette. Il marchait en balançant les poings, son chapeau mou crânement posé sur l'oreille, les biceps écartés du corps, comme un athlète qui s'avance dans l'arène" (205). Feuillebois's confident, athletic bearing is emphasized, foreshadowing the description of his eventual decline. A closer examination, however, reveals the less prominent but no less important markers of psychological disturbance. "Bilieux" is a qualifier originating in Hippocrates's theory of temperaments, which signifies that an individual's liver, or yellow bile, prevails over the other three bodily humors (blood, phlegm, and black bile), leading to an irritable, pessimistic, or bitter nature. In that light, Feuillebois's "teint olivâtre" reinforces his irritability, since the adjective "bilieux" also refers to a yellowish-green color.

Feuillebois's "propre évangile" and his confidence in his homeland sustained him when his only child was drafted at the start of the war. When several months pass with no news from his son, however, his faith is shaken and his inner torment soon begins to register in his body and accelerated ageing: "Et maintenant, [Feuillebois] le vieil ami de Samuel, usé par cette éternelle attente, las de compter une à une les heures, écrasé par ce poids moral chaque jour plus lourd, n'était plus que l'ombre de lui-même. Ses cheveux avaient blanchi. Ses joues se ravinaient. Sa haute taille courbée, sa démarche fléchissante, lui donnaient l'allure d'un vieillard. Ce colosse faisait pitié" (216). The weight of his suffering is evident in his bent body and his stagger as well as in the general wasting of his body. When after a long absence he reappears, his friends can read the cause in his face:

> Feuillebois avait dû recevoir le coup de grâce. Cet homme de soixante ans en paraissait quatre-vingts. Les muscles relâchés de la face creusaient des sillons de souffrance et de déception. Ses yeux avaient perdu leur éclat. Ses longs cheveux flottants lui donnaient un air de négligence et d'abandon. Et son ample jaquette, devenue trop large pour ce corps décharné, pendait en longs plis disgracieux. (217)

The narrator plays up the effect of emotional stress on the man's body with the finality of the allusion to the "coup de grâce," the shot to the head used to end a mortally wounded soldier's agony. That military allusion also provides a link to the son lost on the battlefield. The focus on Feuillebois's face emphasizes the somatization of his grief, which is underscored by his neglected personal hygiene. Tellingly, too, his eyes—the proverbial mirror of his soul—"avaient perdu leur éclat," which points to his extinguished life force. The father's silence is significant as well; indeed, the absence of any verbal expression of psychological pain is a direct indication of the magnitude of the loss. In his memoir *Trente mille jours*, Maurice Genevoix offers a portrait of the grieving father of one of his comrades killed in action during the First World War: "Le père, entre ses rares paroles, laissait ses yeux vaguer au loin. . . . Et soudain ses mâchoires se crispaient, j'en voyais les muscles frémir" (196). The father's silence and emotional distance in Genevoix's description suggest that Van der Meersch's character is inspired by the experiences of those he interviewed in preparation for writing as well as by literary imagination.

Feuillebois's description calls to mind Balzac's père Goriot, also known as "le Christ de la paternité," because this is in essence the portrait of a broken father whose pain is etched into his face. As Goriot sells off his belongings to pay his daughters' debts, his visage betrays his anguish: "Quand le père Goriot parut pour la première fois sans être poudré, son hôtesse laissa échapper une exclamation de surprise en apercevant la couleur de ses cheveux, ils étaient d'un gris sale et verdâtre. Sa physionomie, que des chagrins secrets avaient insensiblement rendue plus triste de jour en jour, semblait la plus désolée de toutes celles qui garnissaient la table" (253). Balzac and Van der Meersch each register the change in physiognomy by means of vestimentary references. Like Goriot's, Feuillebois's formerly athletic body has wasted away, rendering him "décharné" in his now-oversized jacket. Feuillebois is a man decaying from the inside out, his grief becoming externalized in his physiological deterioration: "Pendant quelques semaines, ils [Samuel et Gaspard] revirent leur ami [Feuillebois] assez régulièrement, mais il parlait peu, ne manifestait d'intérêt pour rien, et semblait avoir l'esprit égaré dans une douloureuse contemplation" (218). The former teacher's silence is a direct indication of his imminent death for, like Goriot, he turns inward, giving in to the grief that eats away at him. Feuillebois's paternal suffering has a symbolic meaning as well, since it parallels that of millions of French citizens in the unending war. In short, his personal loss and grief are a microcosm of that of the population of northern France under German occupation.

Balzac is by no means the sole inspiration for *Invasion 14*. As we saw above, Zola's influence is equally evident in the novel's epic scope and naturalistic representation of life during the occupation, an influence Van der Meersch himself repeatedly recognized (Newsome, "Maxence" xi). Newsome notes that while both authors were keenly interested in the way in which the environment influences individuals, Van der Meersch delves more deeply into the characters' psychology than his predecessor ("Maxence" xxii). While it is true that Zola did not directly study Lavater's theories in his extensive preparation of his novels, Christopher Rivers notes that the author of the *Rougon-Macquart* shares with Lavater "the goal of ordering our knowledge of life through correlations between that which is immediately accessible to us . . . and that which is beyond the immediate field of our vision or experience" (176-77).

The most fully developed manifestation of the mind-body association in *Invasion 14* is found in its use as allegory, the foundational examples of which are those of parents separated from their children during the occupation. The underpinnings of the Zolian intertext in Van der Meersch's novel lies, appropriately enough, in Adélaïde Rougon, often referred to as tante Dide or simply Dide, the source of *la tare héréditaire* that plagues her descendants. Dide exhibited odd behavior for much of her life and, after giving birth to her first child, she experienced an escalation in what the novel's narrator characterizes as epileptiform seizures. Raising the two children she had out of wedlock with Macquart alongside her "legitimate" son, Pierre Rougon, "Adélaïde ignorait ce qu'on appelle « sauver les apparences »" (Zola, *La fortune* 64). *Invasion 14* offers a World War I equivalent of tante Dide with the character of Fannie Sennevilliers, a young widow whose husband Jean is killed in the war. Fannie takes up with a forty-something German soldier, Paul, who is billeted at her home. For all intents and purposes, Paul replaces Jean as the head of household in the same way that Macquart replaces Rougon in the first novel of the Rougon-Macquart, *La fortune des Rougon*. Much like tante Dide, Fannie makes no effort to "sauver les apparences," although she telegraphs her shame when she cuts off all contact with her family and friends. Eventually, Fannie faces the consequences of her choices when her sister-in-law Lise Sennevilliers confronts her about her infidelity to her late husband and about the arrest—and likely execution—of his brother Henri: "Vous avez accepté l'ennemi, vous l'avez soutenu, c'est votre faute si on n'aura pas la victoire, c'est vous qui tuez les nôtres. Fille à Boches ! . . . [J]e te maudis, maudis, maudis !" (259). The term "fille à Boches" was commonly used to refer to women who fraternized with the enemy, but it is all the more demeaning in Fannie's case because she is a war widow.

If Fannie's unconventional (for the time) lifestyle echoes that of Adélaïde Rougon, her "punishment" by her community seems inspired by a scene in Zola's *Germinal* which, like *Invasion 14*, takes place in the Nord. Cécile Grégoire, the daughter of one of the shareholders of the Montsou mine, is attacked by the women who mistake her for madame Hennebeau, the wife of the mine's manager: ". . . c'étaient sa robe de soie, son manteau de fourrure, jusqu'à la plume blanche de son chapeau, qui exaspéraient. Elle sentait le parfum, elle avait une montre, elle avait une peau fine de fainéante qui ne touchait pas au charbon" (356). Cécile becomes the target of the crowd, her clothing, perfume, and soft skin the antithesis of the tattered rags, rancid body odor, and irritated skin of the miners: ". . . les femmes, dans cette rivalité sauvage, s'étouffaient, allongeaient leurs guenilles, voulaient chacune un morceau de cette fille de riche" (356). The horde attempts to degrade Cécile by literally stripping her of the trappings of her privilege. This mob scene is one segment of the larger class struggle that is at the heart of *Germinal*. For the enraged crowd, Cécile represents the rich who profit by enslaving the working class.

Van der Meersch stages a similar drama in *Invasion 14*, substituting the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie with that of resisters and collaborators. As is the case with Cécile, Fannie is targeted on the streets of the fictional city of Herlem because she represents all those who collaborate with the oppressors. Fully aware that Fannie is pregnant with the child of her German lover, the crowd surrounds her, shouting the same slur that Lise uses, "fille à Boche." One man, grabbing at Fannie's swollen belly, says: "On peut tâter, les amis, c'est pas du faux… dit un troisième, avançant les mains vers son

corsage, tandis qu'elle [Fannie] reculait avec épouvante" (267). Fannie's pregnant belly is the equivalent of Cécile's finery in that it is a sign of privilege accorded by the enemy. Lapidated as punishment for her sin like the adulterous women in the Bible, Fannie escapes the mob to give birth surrounded by the German soldiers living on her property. Like Cécile, who is saved from the angry mob by Deneulin, owner of the Jean-Bart mine, Fannie's salvation comes from those who ensure her privilege. Giving birth with the help of the occupying forces is at once proof of her status as a "fille à Boche" and an example of Van der Meersch's humanizing of the enemy. His even-handedness in portraying Germans in *Invasion 14* caused some controversy in his native region where, even two decades later, the occupation was still fresh in the population's memory.

After giving birth, Fannie experiences what today's reader is likely to understand as postpartum depression: "Elle mangeait à peine, s'intéressait peu à sa petite, qu'elle ne pouvait allaiter. On eût dit qu'elle n'était déjà plus de cette terre. Elle dormait rarement, parlait seule des nuits entières et faisait peur à [son fils] Pierre. Il devint bientôt évident qu'elle perdait la tête" (273). In this passage, Fannie resembles tante Dide, whose "crises nerveuses" and "balbutiements d'épouvante" signal postpartum depression: "Il y avait des nuits où elle se serait levée pour courir se jeter dans la Viorne, si sa chair faible de femme nerveuse n'avait eu une peur atroce de la mort" (Zola, *La fortune* 63, 74). The intertextuality between *La fortune des Rougon* and *Invasion 14* is evident in Fannie's manner of death, which is precisely the manner imagined in Dide's suicidal ideation. Although Dide never acts on her impulse, Fannie gives into hers. She disappears one day, only to be found by a young boy skating on a frozen pond: "Et c'est ainsi qu'au travers de la masse de cristal translucide et figée, il aperçut, il devina plutôt une longue forme emprisonnée, la face au ciel, ses cheveux blonds déroulés en arrière. Le gel, en les pétrifiant, en avait respecté la souple ondulation flottante. . . . Fannie avait enfin trouvé le définitif apaisement" (273-74). What stands out is her peaceful expression, which demonstrates that the suffering of the occupation can only be relieved through death.

In 1926, French social worker Suzanne Serin conducted a study of suicide in the aftermath of World War I, concluding that, contrary to popular belief, most cases were not because of mental illness. Instead, among the patients she studied, as Gregory M. Thomas underlines, "According to her, personal grief was the primary factor in many suicides. . . . [M]uch of the grief suffered by those hopeless souls involved the loss of a close social relationship—either a spouse, a lover, or a child" (83). In this light, the case of Fannie Sennevilliers represents those of countless other French civilians who were left despondent by their losses. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that for Dide as well as Fannie, the source of their illnesses lies in "la condition féminine."

The psychosomatic and physiognomic descriptions in *Invasion 14* are the product of Van der Meersch's long-standing interest in the mind-body connection, which culminated in the writing of *Corps et âmes*, a showcasing of the work of physician Paul Carton, a practitioner of naturopathy. An alternative medicine that grew out of nineteenth-century vitalism, naturopathy centers on the promotion of "the healing power of nature" and advocacy of "treat[ing] the whole person" (American Association of Naturopathic Physicians). In reviewing Van der Meersch's novel *Corps et âmes*, physician Roger Vercel maintains that the author integrated the theory of degeneration as set forth in the work of

Bénédict Morel and Valentin Magnan, alienists whose works profoundly influenced Zola (272). Julien Schwarz and Burkhart Brückner explain that Morel "attributed the progressive degradation of the human genome to social causes (with regard to the proletarian class), intoxication (mainly alcohol abuse), or 'congenital' and 'acquired' defects, all of which lead to damages to the offspring that can be observed in the phenotype of the next generation." Zola's use of Morel's theory in developing the main characters of *Rougon-Macquart* is, of course, the foundation of the series. Van der Meersch, I will argue, followed Zola's literary blueprint by employing the tenets of the theory of degeneration to create the character of Zidore Duydt.

Eighteen-year-old Isidore Duydt (aka Zidore) and his thirty-year-old hunchback brother, Étienne le Boscot, who engaged in gold trafficking with the German occupiers, demonstrate the way in which physiological signs point to moral corruption. It is interesting to note that, compared to studies on the black market in Nazi-occupied France, relatively little research has been done on such activities during the First World War. James E. Connolly asserts that

> the perception of *ravitailleurs/fonceurs* held by the occupied population at large and both occupied and non-occupied French authorities remained overwhelmingly one of suspicion. Many interviews of *rapatriés* focus on this point. It was often suggested that *ravitailleurs/fonceurs* were in the pocket of the Germans, procuring gold for the latter, denouncing compatriots, or working for the German counter-espionage service, even if their actions occasionally did "help the population out." (158)

Based on Connolly's research, then, the story of the Duydt brothers is historically accurate. Étienne, the oldest child in the family, brings Zidore in to his lucrative dealings with the occupiers. His physical description immediately transmits his moral deficiency to the reader: "Petit, contrefait, le teint blême, avec un museau de rat et des yeux étonnement brillants et fureteurs . . ." (170). What stands out in the initial description of Étienne is his resemblance to a rat, an animal often associated with evil. The fact that Étienne is a hunchback makes him, as Barbier notes, "une figure particulière, personnage difforme, anormal, qui ne peut être issu que de la main du diable et synonyme de ruse et d'ingéniosité" (79). Étienne's criminality—a compensation for his deformity, Barbier suggests—is underscored by his other physical ailments: "Cet ancien tailleur, difforme, débile, les yeux creux, les membres effroyablement maigres, les mains squelettiques et immenses, malade du cœur et de l'estomac, atteint d'une lésion pulmonaire qu'il maintenait à peu près stable par on ne sait quel miracle de volonté, — était une puissance" (Van der Meersch, *Invasion 14* 49). "Débile" here designates both his physical and moral degeneracy. The fact that le Boscot suffers from heart, stomach, and lung ailments, moreover, confirms the physical signs of his corruption. There is a symbolic meaning to these ailments as well, since the heart is the seat of emotions while gastrointestinal problems are often the symptom of stress and psychological imbalance. His "yeux creux" and "mains squelettiques," meanwhile, have the narrative function of foreshadowing his death.

Newsome points out that Van der Meersch borrowed from naturalist theories in order to "emphasiz[e] the role of environmental factors as much as 'depraved imaginings' " ("Occupation" 54). Henri Mitterand underscores the influence Hippolyte Taine had on Zola's writing: "Après Michelet, et, chronologiquement, avant Balzac, Taine est bien le

deuxième père nourricier, non seulement de l'esthétique théorique de Zola, mais de sa stratégie romanesque" (14). In effect, Mitterand explains, his study of Taine's writings led to Zola's famous declaration that "une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" (Zola, "M. H. Taine" 229). The original formula refers to the way artists' temperaments impact their writing but, as Mitterand explains, "Taine enrichit ce modèle théorique, en convainquant le jeune écrivain [Zola] de transposer dans la création romanesque la méthode même de la critique moderne, fondée sur l'analyse exacte des déterminations biologiques (la « race »), historiques (le « moment ») et sociales (le « milieu »)" (13). Zidore's father, who would fit perfectly in the *Rougon-Macquart*, is a miner displaced by the war who sets up a black market business in a shack and who passes on his violent behavior to his son: "Il y faisait commerce de tout ce qu'il était possible de vendre ou d'acheter, rouait de coups sa femme et ses deux plus jeunes enfants, qu'il faisait courir les rues, voler et rapiner, et qu'il exploitait comme un capital" (48). Zidore manages to leave behind his toxic father but not his physicality: "Zidore se rebellait, répondait aux gifles par des coups de poing, gagnait de l'argent à pratiquer la boxe dans les cabarets . . ." (48-49). Disadvantaged by his socio-economic situation, he nonetheless makes the best of the genetic hand he has been dealt: "Petit et râblé, nerveux, il possédait une force musculaire remarquable, et comme il fréquentait des cabarets louches et des milieux où la force était reine, il fut bientôt craint et recherché" (169). Zidore's frequenting of seedy establishments allows him to cultivate his imposing presence. His dual nature—at once "nerveux" and "râblé," vulnerable yet tough—dominates his initial description. "Nerveux" is particularly striking since it alludes to the *tare héréditaire* of the Rougon-Macquart, suggesting that Zidore's genetic makeup contributes to his fate. Initially, the young man shows signs of a willingness to lead an honest life: "Ce garçon-là, somme toute, avait commencé courageusement" (168) and, for a time, resists the temptation to go into business with Étienne. Despite his best efforts, however, Zidore cannot escape his milieu and is reduced to living off the grid with other resisters and petty thieves who manage to survive by stealing from the occupiers. The last element in Taine's formula, *le moment*, seals Zidore's fate:

> On vit ainsi pendant la guerre beaucoup de jeunes gens se mettre en quelque sorte hors la loi volontairement et, contraints à une existence nouvelle dangereuse, à des fréquentations néfastes, à des séjours démoralisants dans les prisons allemandes, se gangrener, arriver à se déclasser et se dégrader sans remède, alors que le point de départ initial de leur aventure avait été un acte d'héroïsme. (48)

Zidore's situation, then, is a microcosm of that of the generation that lived through the German occupation during World War I.

It is Zidore's association with the criminal element that triggers the starting point of his psychological affliction: ". . . la fréquentation des fonceurs, des pillards et des voyous l'avait gangrené" (168). "Gangrener" is used repeatedly to describe the influence Zidore's milieu has on him. This verb, ordinarily used to describe tissue death and decomposition in a living organism, draws attention to the mind-body connection in the young man's case history, specifically the young man's eroding morality. Zidore's missteps continue when he falls in love with Georgina, a heavy-drinking prostitute twice his age who predicates their relationship on his material support. Georgia becomes his "morale" (172), further evidence

of his psychological erosion. Zidore is vulnerable to manipulation because of his fear that Georgina will leave him and because of the debt he owes to another petty criminal.

Desperate to find money to keep Georgina in the manner to which she is accustomed, Zidore becomes involved with three criminal associates who force him to set up his older brother Étienne: Otto, a deserter from the German army, la Citrouille—to whom he owes money—and le Roux. Le Roux is the ringleader, his hair color a tip-off to his malevolent nature because of its traditional association with the devil. There are no other physical descriptions of le Roux because his sobriquet conveys all that the reader needs to know. La Citrouille, a "petit gros à face bouffie et ronde, . . . l'air un peu du cucurbitacé auquel il devait son surnom" (173), demonstrates that Van der Meersch does not limit his physiognomical allusions to the animal kingdom. La Citrouille has no real personality, which conveys his status as a follower. Le Roux and la Citrouille force Zidore to bring his brother to an abandoned house where the men brutalize Étienne in an effort to get him to reveal where he keeps his gold. It is le Roux—the novel's "personnage machiavélique par excellence" (Barbier 79)—who finishes off le Boscot, his cruelty confirming the significance of his red hair. After the murder, the men divide up the gold Étienne had on him—27,000 gold coins split five ways between le Roux, la Citrouille, Otto, Zidore, and another accomplice, Olivier. Zidore's delivering his brother to his murderers in exchange for a cut of his gold stash echoes Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Victim of his "nervous" nature, Zidore stays behind as the others leave, and "s'appuya au mur. Il eut un haut-le-cœur, un vomissement épouvantable, qui le plia en deux. Il semblait qu'il dût rendre tout ce qu'il avait dans le ventre" (182). The mind-body association here is clear; vomiting is the physiological reaction to his dastardly act, a prime example of emotions becoming externalized.

With le Boscot's murder, the final component in Taine's theory, *le moment*, has been activated and the final act of Zidore's life has begun. The distraught Zidore engages in self-destructive behavior, drinking heavily and spending his ill-gotten gains in an attempt to assuage his guilt: "Puis il devint malade. Intoxiqué d'alcool, son organisme rejeta, repoussa le poison. Zidore, abattu, prostré, misérable, . . . vécut dans une espèce d'accablement physique, la tête lucide et le corps abruti" (183). Zola's influence virtually leaps off the page, in particular the use of the word "organisme," because it reduces the young man to the sum of his biological components, leaving him unable to determine his own fate. His alcohol dependence, meanwhile, is reminiscent of that of Gervaise Macquart in *L'assommoir*.

Zidore's physical decline is a sign that, despite his "tête lucide," he is psychologically damaged by his role in his brother's death. He feverishly reviews his entire life, trying to determine the moment at which it began its downward trajectory and, when he realizes that his obsession with Georgina is what precipitated his decline, he takes out his anger on her: "Il la frappait, la tenait claustrée près de lui des jours entiers, puis la rejetait avec dégoût, la chassait comme une bête" (183). His abuse of Georgina confirms the role of heredity in his fate, since his father "rouait de coups sa femme et ses deux plus jeunes enfants" (48). Zidore's guilt over his complicity in Étienne's murder gnaws away at him, manifesting in his increasingly paranoid thoughts and conjuring his brother's "visage blême, ses yeux noirs, cette tête aiguë entre les hautes épaules difformes. Qu'y avait-il, au

fond de ce regard suprême ? . . . Ce regard, quelle formidable malédiction il avait dû signifier !" (185). He experiences hallucinations of his brother's rotting corpse, which he saw when he "haunted" the crime scene before it was discovered by authorities: "L'alcool surexcitait son délire, suscitait devant ses yeux des spectacles abominables de pourriture" (187).

The depiction of Zidore's guilt and self-loathing may be understood as an homage of sorts to Zola's first major novel, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), in which the title character's lover Laurent kills her husband Camille. Like Zidore, Laurent experiences hallucinations of his victim. In *Thérèse Raquin*, Laurent's first nightmare features Camille who greets him at his apartment door: ". . . ce fut Camille qui lui ouvrit, Camille tel qu'il l'avait vu à la morgue, verdâtre, atrocement défiguré. Le cadavre lui tendait les bras, avec un rire ignoble, en montrant un bout de langue noirâtre dans la blancheur des dents" (151). In both novels, the apparition of the murder victim and his silent condemnation of his murderer constitute the embodiment of a tortured conscience, the visions of the decaying bodies essentially golems of guilt.

Zidore's psychological decline is accompanied by a precipitation in his physical deterioration; in the span of several weeks, the ordinarily confident boxer becomes jumpy, exhibiting "une prudence de félin" (184). He is unable to unburden himself to anyone, least of all to his sister Léonie, his usual confidante, because he is certain that his face will betray his guilt in his brother's death: "Ça ne se prononce pas, ces mots-là. Elle le lirait, elle le devinerait sur son visage ?" (186). Nor can he go to Étienne's funeral because "On lirait l'aveu sur sa face" (186). In other words, Zidore's guilt has become externalized. With the help of the fickle Georgina, the police finally track the tortured man down to a bar, by which time his appearance has become skeletal: ". . . sa petite tête osseuse et pâle, creusée aux joues. La barbe mal rasée brillait en aiguilles d'or" (193). The description of Zidore builds on the details of his crime; his skull evokes Étienne's corpse while his stubble calls to mind the gold for which his brother died. After shooting one of the policemen, Zidore is kicked to death by his victim's partner, his face reduced to mush by the beating, symbolically erasing his identity and his very humanity. His final thoughts go to Étienne, who materializes before him one last time: "Mais il n'y avait pas de haine sur l'étroit visage blême, adouci, et comme dépouillé d'amertume. Seulement une immense pitié, une immense miséricorde... Zidore eut, vers cette ombre, un effort désespéré" (194-95). This last image is ambiguous, the benevolent hallucination implying that if Zidore's sin has been expiated, his psychological suffering has not been entirely relieved even as he takes in his last breath.

Invasion 14, as we have seen, is based on an interdiscursive fabric composed of allusions to the works of Balzac and Zola. Mitterand explains that in Zola's works,

> . . . le corps humain est toujours déjà thématisé, puisqu'il sert de comparant pour la représentation d'une matière et d'une nature que le romancier doue de fonctions et d'affects biologiques : appétit, dévoration, absorption, sensualité, sexualité, intentionnalité. Mais, dans la hiérarchie des représentations romanesques, il semble bien occuper la première place, devant la nature, et il fait évidemment l'objet d'une thématisation autonome. (75)

Mitterand's assessment of Zola's work is equally applicable to *Invasion 14* because, like Zola, Van der Meersch wanted to create a social history of sorts by following members of the Sennevilliers and Duydt families. Zola's declaration in the preface to the first novel of

the *Rougon-Macquart*, *La fortune des Rougon*, rings true for *Invasion 14* as well although, of course, in the latter, the historical context is the German occupied Nord: "Historiquement, ils partent du peuple, ils s'irradient dans toute la société contemporaine, ils montent à toutes les situations par cette impulsion essentiellement moderne que reçoivent les basses classes en marche à travers le corps social, et ils racontent ainsi le Second Empire à l'aide de leurs drames individuels, du guet-apens du coup d'État à la trahison de Sedan" (8). Its historical import notwithstanding, *Invasion 14* is a significant literary work built on the foundation provided by the realist novels of the nineteenth century, a continuation of sorts of the attempt by French novelists such as Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola "to see the invisible, know the unknowable, and narrate that which lies beyond the limits of narration" (Rivers 7). Critics such as Newsome and Barbier have drawn attention to Van der Meersch's artistic debt to Balzac, in particular the latter's application of Lavater's theory of physiognomy, the pseudoscience that advocated interpreting individuals' physical traits in order to discern their character. For her part, Barbier points to the intricacy of Van der Meersch's use of physiognomy and psychosomatic symptoms to make the body a "moyen d'expression de l'âme" (80). It is Van der Meersch's artistry, in particular his use of the mind-body connection in his development of the main characters of *Invasion 14*, that offers us insight into the psychological effects of the German occupation of 1914-18 on the civilian population of northern France.

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