ÉCRITURE ARTISTE AND THE IDEA OF PAINTERLY WRITING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My interdisciplinary dissertation, *Écriture Artiste and the Idea of Painterly Writing in Nineteenth-Century France*, studies the notion of *écriture artiste* as an ideologically charged aesthetic doctrine that provides a better understanding of the rapports between art and the socio-historical context of mid nineteenth-century France. Specifically, using a case study approach, I examined four encounters between writers and painters, including Gustave Flaubert, Gustave Moreau, the Goncourt brothers, Eugène Delacroix, Émile Zola, Édouard Manet, J.-K. Huysmans and Odilon Redon. I analyzed how these pairings, each illustrative of a different facet of *écriture artiste*, highlight extratextual realities of the time through aesthetic embellishments. Findings show that some of these artists refashion the existing hierarchy of academically legislated rules on style by purposefully obscuring legibility in order to valorize artistic productions as alternatives to, not copies of, nature. Moreover, they reshape cultural views by staging the coexistence of lyrical and positivist elements, thus encouraging an array of subjective interpretations. I conclude that *écriture artiste* provides a valid framework for analyzing a self-conscious type of art that uses symbolic power to shape public taste. In turn this provides alternatives to a monolithic model upheld by legitimate culture. The central contribution of my project is its analysis of *écriture artiste* as a concept that does not fit neatly specific categories of

genre or literary movements. This research was funded by departmental grants and a fellowship from the Oregon Humanities Center.

My work intervenes in extant debates on literature and the visual arts in the latter half of the nineteenth century by challenging the critical tradition that considers *écriture artiste* as a pedantic descriptive style. My dissertation broadens the scope of *écriture artiste* beyond the work of the Goncourt brothers. This expansion of the field also reveals that this type of art theory is developed with an acute consciousness about the power of art and the artist to reach a changing readership, prompted by the shifting ideological climate of the time.

This dissertation includes previously published material.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: *ÉCRITURE ARTISTE:* WRITING LIKE AN ARTIST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

At the height of mid nineteenth-century debates on letters and visual arts, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt occupied a central role. While the interconnectedness of art and literature in the work of the Goncourt brothers has been the subject of numerous aesthetic studies, there has been no concrete investigation into the socio-historical significance of their art theory, which they called *écriture artiste,* and that roughly translates to art writing or painterly writing.[1] My dissertation, *Écriture Artiste and the Idea of Painterly Writing in Nineteenth-Century France*, addresses a gap in the scholarship of this period, thus painting a more comprehensive portrait of the prevalent nineteenth-century discourses on art, society, and politics. First it provides new perspectives into the filiations between the Goncourt brothers and their more illustrious contemporaries Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, and J.-K. Huysmans. It does so by relinquishing the labels of literary currents, and by reexamining narrative instances of unresolved tension between image and text. It concentrates on specific traits of the works that provide insights into the significance of "writing like an artist," or "painterly writing," within the ideological frameworks of nineteenth-century French society. Second, it demonstrates that this type of artistic writing, generally defined by critics as a pedantic, overly

[1] Some of the most prominent studies on this topic include Robert Ricatte's *La Création romanesque chez les Goncourt* (1953) and Bernard Vouilloux's *L'art des Goncourt: une esthétique du style* (1997).

metaphorical literary style, abounding in references to painting, sculpture, and art objects, is in fact a politicized concept, since it uses symbolic power to shape public taste.[2]

The complex and fluid notion of *écriture artiste* is situated by critics at the intersection between art, literature and art criticism. Edmond de Goncourt uses this syntagm in the Preface to his novel *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879), defining it as an idiosyncratic style that is designed to distort literary clichés expressed through trite academic conventions. This metaphoric language, adds Goncourt, is an integral component of a new type of narrative, the Realist novel of elegance ("roman Réaliste de l'élégance"). Contemporary critics, including Robert Ricatte, Bernard Vouilloux, Jean-Louis Cabanès and Dominique Pety have interpreted this affirmation as the artist's rejection of all pragmatic interests and practices. Current scholarship on *écriture artiste* focuses primarily on the formal aspect of this notion and portrays it as a distorted manifestation of Théophile Gautier's art for art's sake poetics. Contextualizing Edmond de Goncourt's affirmation, I contend that *écriture artiste* is part of a critical project that mixes aesthetic theory with cultural and politicized ideologies. My definition of *écriture artiste* aligns with Bourdieu's theory, expounded in *La Distinction,* where the sociologist makes the case that aesthetic taste is an instrument of social power in as much as it legitimates certain cultural and social hierarchies, while subverting others. In an illustrative journal entry from 1859, the Goncourts note:

[2] See, among others, Anne-Marie Perrin-Naffakh "Écriture artiste et esthétisation du réel dans *Germinie Lacerteux*;" Martine Mathieu " De la métaphore à l'allégorie dans *Madame Gervaisais*; Alain Pagès "Zola/Goncourt: polémiques autour de l'écriture artiste;" Françoise Gaillard "Les célibataires de l'art;" Annick Bouillaguet "Proust lecteur des Goncourt : du pastiche satirique à l'imitation sérieuse ;" Stéphanie Champeau "Les Goncourt et la passion de l'artiste" in *Les Frères Goncourt : art et écriture* (ed. Jean-Louis Cabanès 1997).

> La grande passion de la bourgeoisie est l'égalité. L'homme de lettres la blesse, parce qu'un homme de lettres est plus connu qu'un bourgeois. Il y a rancune sourde, jalousie secrète. Puis, la bourgeoisie, grosse famille de gens actifs, faisant des affaires, des enfants, n'a pas besoin d'un grand commerce d'esprit: le journal lui suffit. (*Journal* May 11, 1859)

As this passage exemplifies, Edmond's use of the notion of artist needs to be assessed in light of his and his brother Jules' ideas on class and aesthetic talent, expounded in their *Journal*. The brothers programmatically endorse the idea of the artist as a superior being. Thus, the Goncourts hold accountable the bourgeoisie, whose main representatives in the *Journal* are more often than not wealthy Jewish industrialists, for the declassed position of the artist and the "homme de lettres" in a nineteenth-century society that they consider incapable of appreciating genuine refinement and good quality art ("n'a pas besoin d'un grand commerce d'esprit").

Furthermore, Edmond de Goncourt's statement on *écriture artiste* from the preface to *Les Frères Zemganno* was written in 1879, during the height of the Naturalist movement. At that time Goncourt sought to delineate his and his brother's opus from the literary production of the famous Émile Zola, who was renowned for using brutal tropes to depict the "realities" of the working classes. During the 1880s Edmond de Goncourt stresses the role of *écriture artiste* as a philosophy on both art and social power, whose objective is to revalorize the figure of the "artist" and to commend the merits of artistic freedom in opposition to the questionable bourgeois taste disseminated in fin-de-siècle France.

Écriture Artiste and the Idea of Painterly Writing in Nineteenth-Century France comprises five chapters. In each chapter, apart from the introduction, I take a case study approach and consider encounters between four novelists whose techniques and worldviews echo the works of painters. Each encounter pertains to a different facet of the *écriture artiste*, as a style of writing that, beyond its stylistic intricacies and syntactic dislocations, reflects a system of beliefs and ideals engendered by the perpetual transition between regimes, resulting in the political instability of nineteenth-century French society. The four core traits of the *écriture artiste* that I discuss are as follows: the anti-academic stance, the oversaturation of the textual surface with tropes that hinder legibility, the skillful choreography of a heterogeneous textual mosaic made up of lyrical and scientific-positivist tropes, and the endorsement of subjective modes of seeing in relation to a resurgence of democratic values after the 1870s. In Chapter II, I focus on the Goncourt brothers and Eugène Delacroix; in Chapter III, I analyze Gustave Flaubert and Gustave Moreau; in Chapter IV, I examine selected pieces by Émile Zola and Édouard Manet, and in Chapter V, I reevaluate the connection between J.-K. Huysmans and Odilon Redon.

The current non-canonical status of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's works, due to the brothers' rampant anti-Semitism and misogyny, confers an air of oddity to the particular association of writers that I propose. However, my archival research at the Goncourt Archives (in Nancy), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Custodia Foundation and the Fonds Lambert (in Paris) has confirmed that the prevailing critical discourse of mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century analyzes Flaubert, Zola, Hugo,

the Goncourts and Huysmans in tandem.[3] The Goncourt brothers were writers, playwrights, collectors, self-appointed social historians of the eighteenth century and art critics. They developed their theories on art, society, and contemporaneous politics in acclaimed venues, ranging from dinners at the renowned Magny restaurant, to the fashionable Parisian Salon of Princess Mathilde, and to cenacles in Edmond's acclaimed attic ("Le Grenier") in his Auteuil residence where the project for the Goncourt Academy came to fruition.[4] Their conversation partners were prominent writers, including Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, George Sand, Victor Hugo, the literary critic Sainte-Beuve, the historian Jules Michelet, as well as the next generation of writers comprising Émile Zola and J.-K. Huysmans.[5] Moreover, in 1919 Marcel Proust was the recipient of the Goncourt Literary Prize for his novel *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*.

The Goncourts are generally portrayed as eccentric collectors and bitter aristocrats, whose participation in the cultural life of their century is limited to vitriolic entries about their peers, surreptitiously written in their personal journal. Although their anti-Semitic verve has been linked to Édourad Drumond's anti-Dreyfusard rhetoric, Goncourt scholars fail to address, together, the aesthetic and politicized implications of the brothers' opus. Recent studies by Michel Winock and Henri Mitterand reaffirm the connections and influences among the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert and Zola, while the

[3] See, for instance, Émile Hennequin's 1890 literary criticism *Quelques écrivains français: Flaubert, Zola, Hugo, Goncourt, Huysmans*.

[4] For an analysis of Edmond de Goncourt's literary cenacle set up in his Auteuil house see, among others, Jean-Louis Cabanès' article "Du Grenier à l'Académie des Goncourt: la terreur douce," 267- 275.

[5] See Robert Baldick's book *Dinner at Magny's* (1971).

publications of the Goncourt Academy bring to the fore the correspondence between Huysmans and Edmond de Goncourt. Nevertheless, literary, art, and cultural historians such as Antoine Compagnon, Michael Fried and Jerrold Seigel analyze the Goncourt journal, *Journal, mémoires de la vie littéraire* (1851-1896) either as an aesthetic treatise or as a sociological document. My dissertation contributes a novel approach to this extant body of work by considering *écriture artiste* as a vantage point that provides insight into key moments in French cultural, artistic, and social history. These range from aesthetic experimentation, to the advent of modernity, to consumer culture and visual consumption; they bring to the fore anxieties regarding a Jewish takeover of French society in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In Chapter II, I examine the Goncourt brothers' *Journal* and their novel *Manette Salomon,* alongside Eugène Delacroix's *Journal* and his treatise on art *Études esthétiques.* I make the case that one of the core features of *écriture artiste* is its subversion of the French classical tradition imposed by the *Académie Française.* I study the causes of what Roger Shattuck calls "the atmosphere of permanent explosion in artistic activity" throughout the nineteenth century, and draw parallels between the literary manifestation of this problematic attitude towards tradition in the works of the Goncourt brothers and the theoretical writings on art of the painter Eugene Delacroix (*The Banquet years* 23). I concentrate on the penchant of these artists for an alternative to the Greco-Roman aesthetics that entails the rejection of the strictly mimetic reproduction of the material world as a guarantor of the artist's talent and genius. Like the painter Delacroix, the Goncourts seem to openly embrace exotic, foreign, and unconventional sources of inspiration. I further contend that, the brothers' undertaking to

define and later legitimize through their *Académie Goncourt,* what it means to be a true artists, and how to write like a true artist, is not only an aesthetic principle, but also a politicized act. The Goncourts' *écriture artiste*, thus, also seeks to inculcate a model of exclusion with strong anti-Semitic undertones. This biased narrative, as Michel Winock has noted in connection to the Goncourt's dissemination of anti-Semitic stereotypes, is designed to relegate Jewish artists to the sphere of "l'art industriel" (*Journal* June 6, 1874, qtd. Winock 201).

I then analyze, in Chapter III, the notion of artificiality of the textual and painted surfaces, as both a formal and thematic manifestation of *écriture artiste.* I read a set of literary portraits of the heroine Salammbô from Gustave Flaubert's homonymous novel, alongside two of Gustave Moreau's paintings from the *Salome* cycle: *The Tattooed Salome* (1874) and *The Apparition* (1876). I use Reinhold Heller's notion of materiality of the "structure of surface" both painted and textual, to examine Moreau's deliberate use of salient blotches of paint and Flaubert's dizzying utilization of a large number of tropes and archaisms, that are meant to unsettle simplified decoding practices. Moreau's paintings and Flaubert's textual surfaces abound in embellishments whose ultimate purpose is to present the artwork as the imaginary creation of an artist, a *plausible* representation of 'reality, not a carbon copy of nature.

In Chapter IV, I scrutinize Émile Zola's *L'Œuvre* as a multilayered text that brings together, in an *écriture artiste*, dissimilar elements; technique that is reminiscent of Édouard Manet's style of the 1860s. I make the case that Zola's unexpected couplings of detailed naturalist observations with his lyrical embellishments denote concerns regarding the writer's role and artistic freedom. Zola staggers between the image of the

writer as a progressive educator of French citizens who follows the precepts of Positivist Science, and the writer as exuberant genius whose creativity should manifest itself outside of constraining doctrines. Part of this chapter has been published with the title "'La lucidité de somnambule': Zola's Allegorical Depiction of Paris in *L'Œuvre*" in *Excavatio* 25 (2015), pages 10-20.

The fourth feature of *écriture artiste,* analyzed in Chapter V, is the poetics of the arabesques, which I explore in Huysman's fin-de-siècle novel *À rebours* and in Odilon Redon's lithographs from the 1870s and 1880s including *Devant le noir soleil de la mélancolie, Lénor apparaît.* I maintain that the subjective distortion of the subject matter is indicative of a liberalization of the arts that leads to the corrosion of claims of medium purity. Painting, writing and music thus become inextricably interconnected in an arabesque-like fashion that enters in conversation with nineteenth-century psychiatric discourses on the workings of the mind during the process of deciphering a work of art.

A vivid interdisciplinary interest in the exchanges and interactions between writing, visual arts, and political ideologies circulating in nineteenth-century France drives my study. *Écriture Artiste and the Idea of Painterly Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* opens up interpretations by re-examining classifications of, and considering moments in the works of individual artists that reveal the particularities of their artistic productions. My goal is to re-contextualize the works of the writers and the painters who meet in this study, and to integrate them into the intricate web of ideas and ideals of their time. Their writing that is inspired by, and inspires in its turn pictorial theory, participates in cultural and politicized discussions, manifested in discourses directed at dogmatic conventions.

CHAPTER II

THE SUBVERSION OF ACADEMIC FRAMEWORKS IN THE JOURNALS OF THE GONCOURT BROTHERS AND EUGÈNE DELACROIX

> Mais en art et en littérature, les opinions consacrées sont sacrées et peut-être, au XIXe siècle, est-il moins dangereux de marcher sur un crucifix que sur les beautés de la tragédie! (E. et J. de Goncourt, *Journal*, Novembre 3, 1861)

An ideological affinity connects the Goncourt brothers and Delacroix, affinity expressed in their contempt for the institution of the *Académie française* (the French Academy). In Delacroix's *Dictionnaire des beaux-arts,* which he started writing in January 1857, the day following his belated acceptance to the *Académie*, upon his seventh candidature, the painter notes: "Académies. Ce qu'en dit Voltaire: qu'elles n'ont point fait les grands hommes" (1).[1] This resembles a remark made by Edmond and Jules in their Journal on July 31,1866: "Les Académies ont été uniquement inventées pour préférer Bonnassieux à Barye, Flourens à Hugo et tout le monde à Balzac" (7:190). For Delacroix and for the Goncourts, the Academic institution of the nineteenth century is both unwilling and unable to offer recognition to talented individuals whose productions do not follow its strict formulas and regulations, some dating back to the seventeenth century. That is because, according to Albert Boime, the institutionalization and subsequent "controlling the arts" meant a move from "the practical to the theoretical" and

[1] In the introduction to Delacroix's *Dictionnaire des beaux-arts*, Anne Larue notes that Delacroix envisaged this dictionary as his artistic legacy (*xii*).

the preeminence of the *style historique* over portrait and landscape painting (*The Academy and French Painting* 1, 3, 7).

The Goncourts, by coining the phrase *écriture artiste*, which is a grammatical distortion of the French language that utilizes the noun "artiste" instead of the adjective "artistique," express their incessant compulsion (continued by Edmond after the death of Jules) to theorize their personal views on art, while also creating the persona of forward thinkers and artistic experimenters. Throughout their literary career, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt proved themselves to be original artists and precursors of the main social, political, and ideological trends occurring in French society during the nineteenth century. [2] These trends range from their Roccoco revival and their taste for Japonisme, to their use of a proto-Impressionist literary style.[3]

Therefore, it is difficult to position Edmond and Jules within the strict boundaries of a unique literary school. While they were considered the founders of literary Naturalism after the publication of *Germinie Lacerteux*, Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau and Katherine Ashley point out that after the death of Jules, Edmond's literary adherence shifted from Naturalism to Decadence, and Gérard Peylet correlates his later work with

[2] About the role of the Goncourt brothers as precursors in nineteenth-century letters, see Marcel Sauvage's 1970 book entitled *Jules et Edmond de Goncourt, précurseurs*.

[3] Regarding *Japonisme*, Edmond de Goncourt was the first French author to translate the biography of Hokusai in French and he also dedicated a monograph to Utamaro. In the *Journal* on October 29, 1868, as well as in the preface to *Chérie,* Edmond claims that he and his brother were the first to introduce to France a taste for Japanese art, citing the example of the "salon parisien meublé de japonaiseries" from their 1851 novel *En 18.*. (*Journal* 8: 145; *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires* 76). Moreover, the Goncourt journal provides valuable information about collectors, dealers of Japanese prints, and bibelots after the 1850s (*Journal,* October 30, 1874; 31 March 1875; April 19, 1884).

mannerist art.[4] Peylet's thesis is that after 1879, Edmond de Goncourt was afflicted by his inability to compete with Zola, who had become the major figure of Naturalism, and thus shifted his literary style to mannerism. Marc Fumaroli in "Le 'siècle' des Goncourt ou le XVIIIe siècle réhabilité," Beatrice Didier in "Les Goncourt, historiens de la Révolution et du Directoire," and Dominique Pety in "Les Goncourt collectionneurs et la renaissance des arts décoratifs" provide compelling studies of the Goncourt brothers' contribution to the revival of the eighteenth century and Rococo style. About the Goncourt brothers as physiologists, in *La Création romanesque chez les Goncourt*, Robert Ricatte notes that the meticulous observation of reality in their novels is frequently undermined by the insertion of poetic effects: "On loue habituellement la précision de leur information médicale. Ils ont lu beaucoup d'ouvrages bien choisis mais … il fallait douter de leur fidélité, par exemple à propos de la maladie de cœur de Renée Mauperin. La folie de Demailly est minutieusement, mais peut-être frauduleusement étudiée. Seule l'hystérie de Germinie offre une évolution contrôlable" (459). In *La Création romanesque chez les Goncourt,* R. Ricatte defines the Goncourt brothers' predilection for descriptions of contemporary Parisian spaces of sociability, as well as the brothers' interest in the

[4] Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau's seminal work *La Tentation du livre sur rien: naturalisme et décadence* and Katherine Ashley's *Edmond de Goncourt and the Novel: Naturalism and Décadence* both argue that Edmond de Goncourt's post-1870 novels set the groundwork for the Decadent literary movement. Regarding the Goncourtian opus and mannerisms, see Gérard Peylet's aforementioned article, "L'Art maniériste d'Edmond de Goncourt dans *La Faustin* ou la déviation du modèle naturaliste." "De manière presque obsessionnelle," writes Peylet, "Goncourt [Edmond] ne cesse d'évoquer dans son *Journal*, à partir des *Frères Zemganno*, sa nouvelle manière d'écrire par rapport à deux modèles naturalistes dont la comparaison le tourmente: celui qu'il est fier d'avoir introduit avec son frère -- mais qu'il est seul désormais [after 1879] à considérer comme modèle -- *Germinie Lacerteux*, et celui qu'il voudrait rejeter et qui le hante à cause de sa supériorité, celui que secrètement il désespère de ne pouvoir égaler, *L'Assommoir.* À partir du moment où il écrit *La Faustin*, le besoin impérieux de comparer *Germinie Lacerteux* et *La Faustin* d'une part, *Germinie Lacerteux* et le roman de Zola d'autre part, se manifeste, trahissant de plus en plus ce que C.-G. Dubois appelle 'le complexe du maniériste'" (261). Peylet bases his argument on Dubois's analysis of mannerist aesthetics in *Le maniérisme* (1979).

analysis of color effects determined by changing light at different moments of the day and during different seasons, as a proto-Impressionist literary style of (462-63).

Goncourt studies, which fell out of grace due to the brothers' contemptible anti-Semitic and misogynistic views, were revived in 1990s as part of a larger trend to study literature and visual art in tandem. For instance, the publication of *Edmond et Jules de Goncourt- Art et Artistes* (1997) a collection of the brother's texts on art, rekindled the interest of critics in the brothers' aesthetic theories. Notable studies include Bernard Vouilloux's two studies *L'Art des Goncourt. Une esthétique du style,* and *Le Tournant artiste de la littérature française. Écrire la peinture au XIXe siècle*. Nicholas Valazza's *Crise de plume et souveraineté du pinceau. Écrire la peinture de Diderot à Proust* proposes an examination in the genre of Vouilloux. Dominique Péty's *Les Goncourt et la collection*. *De l'objet d'art à l'art d'écrire* analyzes the ways in which the Goncourts transfer collecting, as a cultural practice, into their writing. These works are persuasive and eloquent in their interpretations of *écriture artiste* as an unconventional, subversive style of writing that incorporates techniques from the domain of the visual arts. Nevertheless, they neglect to analyze the nature of *écriture artiste* as an artistic ideology. In my examination I contend that *écriture artiste* as both style and ideology is a manifestation of the Goncourt's subversion of the conventions of the Académie Française. Using Bourdieu's theory on taste and cultural capital from *La Distinction,* I contend that the Goncourts use *écriture artiste* with a very clear objective in mind: that of cultivating an image of cultural distinction, refinement and erudition. This, in turn, allows the Goncourts to gain the symbolic capital that legitimizes their judgments of what can be considered vulgar and what can be considered superior art productions. As possessors of

what Bourdieu calls "un goût infaillibe" the Goncourts are given the right to denounce "les goûts mal assurés des détenteurs d'une culture mal acquise" (*La Distinction* 100).

I am indebted to Pierre-Jean Dufief's article "La Critique des institutions académiques à la fin du XIXe siècle," which contends that the Goncourt brothers "proclament contre l'Académie la diversité du beau et Edmond déclare dans la Préface de *Chérie*: 'il n'existe pas un patron du style unique, ainsi que l'enseignent les professeurs de l'éternel beau'" (283). Expanding Dufief's analysis of *écriture artiste* as a style that negates "l'idée d'une langue littéraire claire, universelle" I argue that for the Goncourt brothers *écriture artiste* is not only a literary style, but rather an anti-Academic artistic theory expressed in an original style that unsettles the Academic rules on the purity and syntactic logic of the French language (283). The Goncourt brothers' diverse literary productions exhibit strong sentiments against both bourgeois utilitarianism and the purely formulaic conceptualization of classical antiquity (as it was conceived and sustained by the French Academy). These sentiments, therefore, account for their anti-Academic penchant. This chapter will establish connections between the Goncourt brothers' and Delacroix's desire to reform the French Academic institutions, based on observed parallelisms expressed in their *Journals* that contain their theoretical discourses on art. If, as Jobert argues, Delacroix's paintings "ste[m] from history painting," and are thus seemingly favorable to Academic the hierarchy of genres, his works, analyzed in view of the painter's aesthetic theories expressed in his *Journal*, innovate the formulaic aesthetic patterns and the muted color schemes imposed by the precepts of the Académie des Beaux-Arts (56). Moreover, according to Albert Boime's analysis from his influential

wok *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Delacroix is an official painter, rather than an Academic painter (15).

In what follows I analyze the journals of the Goncourts and Delacroix with *écriture artiste* in mind, expression coined by Edmond de Goncourt in the Preface to his last novel *Chérie* (1884). Edmond defines *écriture artiste* as a personal and original style meant to distort literary clichés expressed through trite Academic conventions such as the "langage *omnibus* des faits divers" (*Préfaces* 68). Situating *écriture artiste* within the context of the entire Goncourtian opus, I claim that it functions as both a style of writing whose methods and techniques are informed by visual arts, and as an ideology that encompasses the aesthetic, social, and political views of the Goncourt brothers. I further contend that in the case of the Goncourts and Delacroix, *écriture artiste* finds its expression in their anti-Academic stances, designed to challenge the overused recipes and doctrines that limit innovation and experimentation. Later in this chapter I will provide an in-depth analysis of the French Academic conventions and how nineteenth-century avant-gardes subverted this formulaic and theoretical model.

This is not to say that the Goncourts' and Delacroix's tendency to subvert the Academically imposed Western cannon, and to incorporate oriental sources of inspiration as legitimate art forms necessarily entail a socially progressive agenda. The painter of the prominent canvas *La Liberté guidant le people* (1830) was rather reserved in his *Journal* about improving the living conditions of the French working classes. In turn, the Goncourt brothers were members of a failing aristocracy who felt threatened by both an increasingly powerful bourgeoisie and the advent of popular culture. Their compulsion with redefining the canon through their *écriture artiste* ideology had a social and

politicized undercurrent since they produced and theorized a type of art for the initiated and the refined that relied on "ces jeux tout de raffinement qui se jouent entre raffinés" (*La Distinction* 585). In fact, the Goncourts tried and succeeded, to a certain extent, to recodify artistic creations by establishing the Académie des Goncourt, which now functions as the Académie Goncourt and the literary prize is simply *Le Goncourt*. In theorizing what it means to write like an artist, to be an artist, and what productions have the legitimate claim to the status of a work of art, the Goncourts connected the affirmation of one's social standing to his or her artistic taste. They also postulated who needed to be excluded from the world of art. As self-proclaimed arbiters of taste who attended some of the trendiest Parisian Salons, such as the Salon of the Princesse Mathilde, Edmond and Jules were expected to make cultural distinctions between good taste and bad taste, between authentic art and vulgar art. While the Goncourts, and Edmond alone after Jules' death (1870) used the symbolic power of *écriture artiste* to champion Modernist aesthetics, this also became a tool to disseminate pernicious and offensive anti-Semitic stereotypes. In the *Journal* (June 6, 1874) Edmond postulated that Jewish people could only produce and appreciate industrial art ("l'art industriel"). This view had previously been expounded in *Manette Salomon* (1867) the novel about a group of Parisian bohemian artists in which the title character, an avaricious Jewish model devoid of any artistic taste, forces her painter husband to produce Academically-sanctioned art because it would sell well to bourgeois collectors. Michel Winock has provided a very compelling analysis of the aforementioned passages as illustrative of the Goncourts' anti-Semitism. By framing *La France juive* (1886) between *Manette Salomon* the novel, and its 1896 theatrical adaptation, Winock has shown the great influence of the

Goncourts' malicious Jewish stereotypes on Drumont's anti-Semitic rhetoric. I will concentrate on the symbolic power of *écriture artiste* (writing like an artist), used an instrument to impose an alternative to the institutional art of the Académie Française. In the last part of this chapter I will examine the symbolic role of the Académie Goncourt as an alternative Academic institution, after the death of Edmond and Jules.

The Goncourts' Annexation of Delacroix as an Affirmation of their Artistic Freedom

Tracing the relationship between the aesthetics of the Goncourt brothers and Delacroix's artistic vision may appear problematic if we consider that the former are writers associated with the Naturalist movement and the latter is a painter considered one of the emblematic figures of Romanticism, who was also a prominent member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Even if we disregard these oversimplified classifications, the association is still not obvious. The Goncourts and Delacroix were not friends, nor did they exchange letters with one another.[5] In fact, as far as visual artists are concerned, the obvious connection to be made would be between the style of the Goncourt brothers and that of Sulpice-Guillaume Chevalier (known as Gavarni), the French engraver and caricaturist.[6] Gavarni was an intimate friend, mentor, and paternal figure for the two

[5] The brothers corresponded with Gautier, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, Hugo, Sand, and Paul de Saint Victor, to name a few of their contemporaries. For more information regarding the rapport between the Goncourts and the artists of their generation, consult Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Correspondance générale* (1843-1862), Volume 1, Paris: Champion, 2004. Other volumes are forthcoming.

[6] See Denys Sutton's article "Gavarni and the Goncourts." (1991): 140-146.

young writers and art critics. In *La Maison d'un artiste* Edmond de Goncourt commends the artist's ability to capture in his lithographs the essence of modern life: "les deux plus grands génies de ce temps [sont] Balzac et Gavarni" (qtd. in Ricatte 18). In fact, Gavarni is omnipresent in the Goncourts' *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire* and constitutes the subject of the last collaborative production of Edmond and Jules, entitled *Gavarni. L'homme et l'œuvre***.** Portrayed as a "dessinateur de *modes*" (81), whose sketches are "études de la vie vivante" (79) that capture "la vie dans la vie de la ligne humaine," Gavarni is to the Goncourts a painter of contemporary, modern life and thus a model to emulate.

It ensues that Edmond and Jules's relationship with Delacroix was more indirect, and at times critical. Théophile Gautier and Sainte-Beuve, who were common friends, mediated the rapports between the three artists. Moreover, Delacroix became a member of the French Academy in 1857, while the Goncourt brothers always resided on the margins of mainstream institutional frameworks. Also, whenever the brothers expressed admiration for Eugène Delacroix's art in their critique of the *Salon de 1855* and in their novel *Manette Salomon* (1867), this acclaim was designed as a disapproval of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's Academic Neoclassical aesthetics that was inspired by Greek and Roman antiquity. This is because, as Baudelaire's art criticism attests, the first half of the nineteenth century was dominated by the artistic rivalry between Ingres' Neoclassicism and Delacroix's Romantic penchants. If the Goncourts made some unflattering remarks about Delacroix in their *Journal,* and provided an inconsistent portrayal of the painter in *Manette Salomon*, they annexed the painter's theories on art to their own so as to show subversive and innovative nature of their writing. Moreover, in

spite of the apparent gap between the aesthetic theories of Delacroix and the Goncourts, Baudelaire's characterization of Delacroix in his *Salon de 1846* points out a set of stylistic patterns revealing a number of similar anti-Academic preoccupations of the painter and the two writers. These are: the heterogeneity of their sources of inspiration, their penchant for creativity combined with their disregard for rigid techniques, their refusal of aesthetic idolatry, and their compulsion to theorize their art.[7] According to Baudelaire, Delacroix was " un des rares hommes qui restent originaux après avoir puisé à toutes les vraies sources, et dont l'individualité indomptable a passé alternativement sous le joug secoué de tous les grands maîtres" (*OC* 2: 432). Baudelaire commends Delacroix's amazing ability to synthesize elements of the great masters' techniques into his unique and individual style, while avoiding the trappings of aesthetic idolatry.

The contemporary Delacroix critic Barthélémy Jobert points out that Delacroix owes his renown to the diversity of his work: "*The Massacre of Chios* and *The Death of Sardanapalus* are paradigmatic of Romanticism, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* of Orientalism, and *Liberty Leading the People* has become a veritable republican icon" (*Delacroix* 7). The heterogeneous nature of Delacroix's artworks, as well as their

[7] In Chapter III of *Manette Salomon*, the Goncourts state that French painting in the 1840s was marked by the rivalry between Ingres and Delacroix, "maître passionnant et aventureux" (1: 22) Although criticism for Ingres is consistent throughout the novel, the literary portrait of Delacroix is more ambiguous, ranging from admiration to disapproval and criticism. For instance, in Chapter XXXV, Delacroix is characterized as: "le plus grand des ratés… Un homme de génie venu avant terme" (*MS* 1: 197). In a *Journal* entry from August 17, 1863, the day of Delacroix's funeral Edmond and Jules, attending one of their famous Magny dinners, reproduce Saint-Victor's remarks on the artist in his final days as a "bilieux ravag[é]"(*J* 6: 109). On March 12, 1885, on the occasion of a Delacroix Exhibit, Edmond remarks that he is "le coloriste le plus inharmonique qui soit" (*J* 13: 211). Edmond also criticizes the painter's compositional technique, which fails to render genuine postures and attitudes: "Quant au mouvement de ses figures, je ne le trouve jamais naturel. Il est épileptique, toujours théâtral, pis que cela: caricatural!" (*J* 13: 211). Edmond concludes his reflection on a bitter note, arguing that the painter is outdated within the fin-de-siècle context: " aujourd'hui, le grand peintre m'apparaît, comme un Beaulieu, comme ce romantique cocasse du pinceau" (*J* 13: 212).

originality, dwell in the richness of his sources, ranging from different epochs and cultures, to different artistic branches: visual, literary, musical. Delacroix's *Journal* abounds with references to visual artists including Michelangelo, Titian, Velázquez, Goya, Rubens and Poussin. The painter was a great admirer of Rousseau, Byron, Racine and Shakespeare, which represent sources of inspiration for some of his most prominent paintings.[8] Moreover, he also held in high esteem the composers Chopin and Rossini. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer argues that Delacroix was interested in popular culture, reading "trendy popular novels" and enjoying "fashionable melodramas" (51).

In Delacroix's article "Questions sur le beau," published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on July 15, 1854, the painter discredits the prevalent view which makes Greek art the norm of aesthetic perfection. "La beauté grecque serait la seule beauté!" exclaims the painter in disbelief. Then he goes on to argue that "Ceux qui ont accrédité ce blasphème sont les hommes qui ne doivent sentir la beauté sous aucune latitude, et qui ne portent point en eux cet écho intérieur qui trésaille en présence du beau et du grand" (36). This paradoxical stance of a member of the prestigious *Institut des Beaux Arts* illustrates the ideological fragmentation occurring within the heart of Academia and of the French art world after the 1850s.[9]

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[8] According to Jobert's study, a large part of Delacroix's "work thus finds its source in mythology, history or literature" (10). Also see David Scott's article " Painting/Literature: The Impact of Delacroix on Aesthetic Theory, Art Criticism, and Poetics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France," pp. 170-186.

[9] It is important to note that not all Academics were partisans of the classical doctrine and that, likewise, not all non-Academics enjoyed the revolutionary philosophy of the avant-gardes. For an in-depth analysis of this distinction, see the first chapter of Boime's *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (1971).

In an entry from the Goncourt *Journal* dated February 12, 1869, Edmond and Jules draw attention to the similarly composite nature of their own opus: "Personne n'a encore caractérisé notre talent de romanciers. Il se compose du mélange bizarre et presque unique, qui fait de nous à la fois des physiologistes et des poètes" (8: 173). This statement summarizes the Goncourts' artistic tribulations, apparent throughout their career: namely, a constant oscillation between an accurate rendition of social mores and an unyielding predilection for lyricism and imaginary exuberance. This is further described in the 1879 *Preface* to the novel *Les Frères Zemganno* as "une tentative dans une réalité poétique" (*Préfaces et manifestes littéraires* 57).[10] Edmond's syntagm could be read as a definition of *écriture artiste*, the Goncourtian poetics, which represents Edmond and Jules' response to the precision and universalistic claims of the Academic style.

Edmond and Jules's entire opus represents an active renegotiation of the definition of the beautiful, a mark of the artistic; they challenge the academic "éternel beau" with the creation of the non-academic "Beau expressif," by which they refer to a product of the artist's temperament, a product that they link to the aesthetics of Delacroix (*Manette Salomon* 16).[11] In Chapter III of *Manette Salomon*, the narrator characterizes the painter and his disciples as members of the artistic vanguard: "Mais, ce n'était qu'une minorité [in the 1840s] cette petite troupe de révolutionnaires qui s'attachaient et se

[10] On the subject of "unnatural realism" or "réalité poétique" and the connection between the novel *Les Frères Zemganno* and Degas's painting *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando,* see Karen Rosenberg's article entitled "A Painterly Eye Catching a High-Flying Muse. Degas's *La La at the Cirque Fernando,* at the Morgan," *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2013.

[11] Subsequent references to this edition will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *M.S.*

vouaient à Delacroix, attirés par la révélation d'un Beau qu'on pourrait appeler le Beau expressif" (16).

Throughout their prolific literary career, the Goncourt brothers, much like their predecessor Delacroix, seek to unsettle the hierarchies between genres by creating a diversified assortment of productions. The Goncourts utilize their *écriture artiste* in literary and non-literary discourses, as journalists (collaborating with *L'Eclair, Le Paris -- 1852, L'Artiste*), as art critics (*La Peinture au Salon de 1855*, *L'Art du XVIIIe siècle* -- 1859, *Gavarni. L'homme et l'œuvre* -- 1873, *Les Peintres japonais : Outamaro ; Hokusai*), as social historians (*Histoire de la société française pendant la Révolution* – 1854 ; *Histoire de la société française pendant le Directoire* – 1855 ; *La Femme au XVIIIe siècle* -- 1862), as novelists (*Germinie Lacerteux* -- 1865, *Manette Salomon* -- 1867), as diarists (*Journal des Goncourt, Mémoires de la vie littéraire* 1887-1896), as playwrights (*Henriette Maréchal* -- 1864), and as travel writers (*L'Italie d'hier, Notes de voyage (1855-1856)*), to name a few of their major works.[12]

Moreover, the Goncourts expressed their subversion by incorporating visual techniques and painterly jargon in this composite style that is *écriture artiste.* Jules even dabbled in painting as a young man, copying Gavarni's drawings.[13] The Goncourts manifest a penchant to produce complex art in literary and visual form, and to *read art*, to use Jean-Luc Chalumeau's phrase from *Léctures de l'art;* the interpretation of their personal style can only be grasped through an attentive consideration of their theory on

[12] This is not intended as an exhaustive list of the Goncourtian opus. I have made a selection, mentioning those works that are most significant to my argument.

[13] In *La Création romanesque chez les Goncourt,* Ricatte points out Jules's penchant for drawing and his admiration for Gavarni*:* "Jules au college copiait déjà ses lithographies…" (33).

art in general, and their conception of the novel in particular. For instance, Edmond and Jules admit to being inspired by the treatment of light in Japanese art and Rococo aesthetics, translated into the style of *écriture artiste* in the form of "impressions claires" (April 19, 1884). In a *Journal* entry from April 19, 1884, Edmond is irritated by the lack of "ouverture de ces intelligences de critiques," a periphrasis alluding to the critics who denigrated his novel *Chérie* (1884), and who disregard the impact of artistic models outside the Western canon, such as Japanese art: "Je parle par exemple du japonisme, et ils ne voient dans une vitrine que quelques bibelots ridicules, qu'on leur a dit être le comble du mauvais goût et du manque de dessin" (13: 110). I will come back to the influence of Japanese art on the Goncourtian poetics later in the chapter.

Delacroix's theoretical and pedagogical production from his *Journal*, his various articles on aesthetics published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* and his *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts,* which together form the literary counterpart to his of paintings, attest to a similar desire to establish himself as an original, forward-looking artist and a model for future generations. In the preface to *Fantin-Latour, Manet, Baudelaire, 'L'Hommage à Delacroix,'* Henri Loyrette points out the pivotal role of Delacroix's aesthetics in the development of the French avant-garde painters: "De ces divers éclairages, il ressort que l'influence de Delacroix, fut celle d'un catalyseur d'énergies nouvelles en mal de cohésion, et que l'artiste offrait à cette génération un modèle de liberté plus précieux encore que des recettes picturales" (8). According to Loyrette, Delacroix's refusal of the canon and its carefully defined, dry, and austere "recettes picturales" makes him an innovative figure within his own generation (the generation of the 1830s) as well within

the generations of Fantin-Latour (1860s) and Cézanne (1880s), both of whom show their appreciation by dedicating paintings to Delacroix.

Several examples attest to Delacroix's fresh outlook. One such example is the salon of 1824, in which Delacroix established his "modèle de liberté" as manifested in *The Massacre at Chios,* a painting inspired by a contemporary political event -- the 1822 Greek war of independence from the Ottoman Empire. Delacroix's originality also stands out in contrast to the works of other artists; during the same year, Jean-Auguste Domninique Ingres *(*1780 –1867) exhibited the academically acclaimed *Vow of Louis XVIII*, a piece that conformed with these very "recettes picturales."[14] Moreover, Delacroix was embraced by the vanguard artists of his time and Baudelaire, his lifelong friend, characterized him as "le peintre le plus original des temps anciens et des temps modernes" (Salon of 1845, *OC* 2: 353). As Andrew Shelton remarks in his article "Ingres versus Delacroix*,"* the latter's "programmatically Romantic" aesthetics, epitomized by his 1827 masterpiece *Death of Sardanapalus,* clashed with Ingres' canvas *The Apotheosis of Homer (1827),* a painting considered by critics a "neoclassical manifesto" (Shelton 742). This moment inaugurated the famous rivalry between the two titans of French painting, a rivalry combining an aesthetic dispute with a political one. Aesthetically this rivalry opposed Ingres's concern with the supremacy of line (the school of Raphael) to Delacroix's passion for color (the school of Rubens). Politically, Ingres' art came to be associated, during the Second Republic, with the discourse of tradition and with Adolphe Thiers's Conservative Party, while Delacroix's taste for innovation was linked then with

[14] In Chapter VI of *David to Delacroix*, Walter Freidlaender provides a very pertinent analysis of the differences between these paintings, exhibited during the same year (106). Freidlaender writes that: "Ingres's art, in its radical emphasis on draftsmanship and abstraction of form, set up a far more extreme ideal than the Poussinists" (106).

Pierre Proudhon's mutualist socialism (Shelton 737). The thematic and compositional differences between the aesthetics of Delacroix and that of Ingres were the subject of notorious debates during the nineteenth century. Baudelaire, in his *Salon de 1845, Salon de 1846, Exposition Universelle 1855, and L'Œuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix, 1863)* as well as the Goncourt brothers (in *La Peinture à l'exposition de 1855, Manette Salomon, 1867, and the Journal, 1851-1896)* had the tendency take sides. They presented Delacroix as an original "coloriste," the champion of Romanticism, and of the modern style, while Ingres was characterized as a "dessinateur," associated with tradition and classical mimesis, "l'adorateur rusé de Raphaël" (*La Peinture à l'exposition de 1855*, 9; *Salon de 1845*, *356*).

Therefore, the rhetoric surrounding Academic and anti-Academic tendencies during the second half of the nineteenth century enabled the Goncourts, as aristocrats and rentiers, to demarcate themselves from the bourgeoisie who, in a desire to acquire social and cultural legitimacy and recognition after the fall of the French monarchy, were supporters of the Academic conventions. If the entire literary production of the Goncourt brothers abounds in anti-bourgeois statements, this aversion for the bourgeoisie, and disdain towards it as a victim of Academic indoctrination, is best expressed in relation to the bohemian painter Anatole who is criticized for valuing the classical frameworks imposed by the Institute:

> En peinture, il ne voyait qu'une peinture digne de ce nom, sérieuse et honorable: la peinture continuant les sujets de concours, la peinture grecque et romaine de l'Institut. Il avait le tempérament non point classique, mais académique, comme la France. (*Manette Salomon* 56)

In this passage, the Goncourts make a distinction between classical Greek and Roman art, which allows for the artist's freedom of expression, and Academic art inspired by the classical models, which imposes rigid didactic doctrines in the imitation of antiquity. According to the Goncourts, Academic art, due to its formulaic and implicitly repetitive character ("la peinture continuant les sujets de concours"), is shown to appeal to bourgeois taste, and to the masses ("la France"), who thus seek to legitimate their taste.

The theme of the French Academy as governor of bourgeois taste is further developed in the Goncourts' attack against the prestigious Prix de Rome offered by the Académie des Beaux-Arts to the best student: "C'était pour lui, comme pour le jugement bourgeois et l'opinion des familles, la reconnaissance, le couronnement d'une vocation d'artiste" (*MS* 56). The painter Anatole dreams of receiving the prize and studying in Rome for purely materialistic reasons, namely, receiving general recognition for his talent. The Goncourts, as self-appointed artistic rebels and members of the literary vanguard, condemn this infatuation in their novel. Edmond often self-promotes his and his brother's "exquisite" artistic taste in their *Journal*: "J'ai rarement éprouvé une jouissance pareille à celle que j'ai à vivre dans cette harmonie somptueuse, à vivre dans ce monde d'objets d'art si peu bourgeois, en ce choix et cette haute fantaisie de formes et de couleur" (November 4, 1875*).* This reflection is meant to reinforce his and his brother's ideological view of art, which opposes the aesthete, as a superior individual surrounded by exquisite objects, to the bourgeois, whose lack of finesse implies the lack of spiritual and intellectual abilities.

The Goncourts, along with Baudelaire, praise Delacroix's revolutionary style as an indirect way of supporting their own originality and defending their own ideological

agenda, namely the contestation of the official institution of art in France, the Academy. In *Manette Salomon* (1867), which depicts the Parisian artistic milieu from roughly the 1840s to the 1860s, the Goncourts present Delacroix as the most emblematic anti-Academic artist of the first half of the nineteenth century, a "maître passionnant et aventureux, marchant dans le feu des contestations et des colères," who disdains the classical model adopted by Ingres, and who proposes a new aesthetic conceptualization, characterized as "le Beau expressif " (22).[15] In his *Salon de 1845*, Baudelaire affirms, undoubtedly referencing his own failed attempts to conquer the academic scene: "M. Delacroix n'est pas encore de l'Académie, mais il en fait partie moralement ; dès longtemps il a tout dit, dit tout ce qu'il faut pour être le premier -- c'est convenu" (*Œuvres Complètes* 2:353). In the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire continues in the same vein, stressing the fact that Delacroix's opus, much like his own poetry, sparks "l'imagination la plus voyageuse," which is equated with exuberance and innovation (*OC* 2: 431).[16]

Robert Kopp points out in his article "Baudelaire et les Goncourt: deux définitions de la modernité," that these three writers promote in their works a similar conceptualization of modernity, defined as "ce qui caractérise le monde immédiatement contemporain, l'instant présent, dans ce qu'il a de plus caractéristique, éventuellement de plus évanescent" (170). Baudelaire and the Goncourts, therefore, claim a direct filiation

[15] The ideological rivalry between Delacroix and Ingres is a recurrent theme of the Goncourts's novel *Manette Salomon.* Also see Freidlaender's *David to Delacroix*, Chapters IV and VI.

[16] In "Ingres versus Delacroix," Andrew Carrington Shelton Shelton writes that "By 1845 such casting of the rivalry between Ingres and Delacroix as the latest re-enactment of the age-old battle between the purity (or coldness) of line and the sensuality (or vulgarity) of color had become a critical commonplace- a development that can be read as both cause and effect of the somewhat belated solidification of the two artists' reputations as the undisputed leaders of the classical and Romantic camps" (732).

with Delacroix as a *chef d'école* in the struggle to promote and implement new literary modes and devices of expression during the second half of the nineteenth century. In their art criticism, *La Peinture à l'exposition de 1855,* the Goncourts use this retrospective of Ingres' and Delacroix's masterpieces as a pretext to ponder their status as artists who are appreciated by the "gens du métier," by utilizing the trope of the man of genius disdained by an injudicious public: "En face de la royauté de M. Ingres se dresse la royauté de M. Delacroix, royauté moins assise et moins officielle, plus fondée sur la reconnaissance des gens du métier que sur l'idolâtrie du public" (38). As young writers, eager to impose themselves in the literary and artistic society of the 1850s, the Goncourts use the *Exposition Universelle*, and Delacroix, as a springboard to establish their allegiance to modernity (as an alternative to Neoclassicism) and to originality in art, renouncing the adulation of the rich collectors in favor of the respect of their peers. Thirty years later, after having visited an exhibit dedicated to Eugene Delacroix at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Edmond de Goncourt the now established writer will confess in his *Journal* that he never really appreciated Delacroix's jarring use of color, which nevertheless subverted the Academically approved color palette: "Je n'ai pas d'estime pour le génie d'Ingres; mais, je l'avoue je n'en ai guère plus pour le génie de Delacroix" (13: 211). Yet Edmond and Jules were careful not to reveal their intimate thoughts in their works of fiction or their art criticism. Here they attacked Ingres's Neoclassical formulas and supported Delacroix as a champion of modernity whose aesthetics was infringing upon Academic values. James Rubin notes that Delacroix symbolized the "artistic contact with the contemporary in an increasingly democratic world" (Rubin 57). Members of later generations, including Fantin Latour, in his 1864 painting *Hommage à Delacroix,* and

Paul Cézanne, in his 1890-94 painting *L'Apothéose de Delacroix,* employ the same tactic of self-promotion by presenting Delacroix as their mentor and their source of inspiration, in the same way that the great master portrayed himself, in his *Journal*, as a disciple of Rubensian aesthetics.[17]

The Academic Doctrine on Literature and the Visual Arts and its Discontents During the Nineteenth Century

In order to better understand the determining factors that prompted an insurrectional reaction in the artistic domain, what Roger Shattuck calls the "permanent explosion in artistic activity" during the nineteenth century, I need to provide a short overview of the French Academic doctrines (*The Banquet Years* 23). The French Academy originated in 1629 as the informal meeting of a group of intellectuals who gathered at the house of Valentin Conrart, the Secretary of Louis XIV.[18] Cardinal Richelieu decided to confer a formal character upon their intellectual debates and, in 1635, the Royal Academy was established as a group of forty learned persons who were elected for life and called "académiciens." The mission of the Academy was to regulate the French language, and to this effect, the members established the well-known *Dictionnaire*: "La principale fonction de l'Académie sera de travailler avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possibles à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre

[17] On this topic consult *Fantin-Latour, Manet, Baudelaire, L'Hommage à Delacroix*, ed. Christophe Leribault, Paris: Louvre, 2011. See also Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's article "Cézanne and Delacroix's Posthumous Reputation," *The Art Bulletin*, 2005.

[18] For more details, see the French Academy's website: http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution/apercu-historique.

pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences."[19] The Académie des Beaux Arts was founded in 1648, and in 1666, Lebrun and Colbert insisted on the creation of the Académie de France à Rome, which allowed students who won the Prix de Rome to experience firsthand Roman and Greek art.[20] Of course, the task of rendering the language "pure" and of determining the appropriate thematic approach to art (both literature and visual art) proved to be very arduous. It gave birth to heated debates such as the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, sparked by the ideological contradictions between two members of the Academy -- Boileau, a fierce defender of the antiquity as the primary source of artistic inspiration, and Perrault, who endorsed contemporary themes and sources.[21] The Academy was dissolved during the French Revolution and replaced by the *Institut national des sciences et des arts* from 1796-1816. In 1816, during the Restauration, the old denomination was reinstated and the Académie française became one of the five universities composing the Institut de France: Académie française, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, Académie des Sciences, Académie des Beaux-arts.[22] It is noteworthy that Lamartine (1829), Victor Hugo (1841), and Alfred de Musset (1852) were accepted as *immortels,* a term used to designate the members of the Académie, thus introducing their romantic ideals within this official institution.[23]

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[19] See article twenty-four on the French Academy's website: http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution/lhistoire.

[20] See the website of the French Fine Arts Academy: http://www.academie-des-beaux-arts.fr/histoire/

[21] See Dominique Pestre's article "La querelle des Anciens et des Modernes. Sans vainqueurs ni vaincus," *Débat Paris*, 1999.

[22] See the French Academy's website: http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution-lhistoire/les-grandes-dates.

[23] See note 16.

However, this apparent liberalization of academic ideology is illusory, if we consider that many of the prominent figures of nineteenth-century literature, including Balzac, Sand, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Zola (who applied 25 times), and Proust, were excluded.[24]

In his book entitled *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Albert Boime points out that ever since its beginning, the Academy had a strong political and social role as the "established body controlling the arts" (3). According to Boime, the move from private artists' studios to a public institution, which conferred prestige upon its members, marked "a social and conceptual change in pedagogy, wherein art instruction shifted (…) from the practical to the theoretical" (1). The King's protection was far from selfless however, and the *immortels* had to sacrifice certain liberties allotted by their private ateliers, in order to embrace and implement a very rigid set of pedagogical approaches (Boime 4). According to Boime, some of the most significant academic requirements were: the preeminence of drawing; a penchant for the *fini* rendered through a "polished" look (16); the use of classical and Biblical sources of inspiration (16); the accurate reproduction of classical models (19); and an almost religious respect for the "hierarchy of subject matter," which stated that historical painting was superior to both portraits and landscapes (although landscape artists were accepted as members of the Académie fraçaise) (20). A good quality painting had to render its subject in a clear manner, using a "sober" color palette that did not overshadow the drawing, and the overall effect was required to be that of "truthfulness and authenticity" (20). The obligation to satisfy such an extensive array of rules made the

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[24] It wasn't until 1980 that a woman (Marguerite Yourcenar) became a member (http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution-lhistoire/les-grandes-dates).

finite product "less an inspired than a calculated creation," which could explain why most of the academic painters who were in vogue during the nineteenth century – such as Delaroche, Gérôme, Meissonier, Cabanel, and Bouguereau – have now lost their renown (Boime 20).

In order to understand the standpoint of the Goncourts in relation to literary Academicism during the Second Empire and the advent of Realism it is important to analyze the views on classical art and tradition that were being developed by their contemporaries.[25] This is relevant because in nineteenth-century theoretical discourses on art, the 'classics' were recuperated by both the champions of modernity and by the Academics in order to uphold their respective agendas. For Edmond and Jules (and later for Proust) the incarnation of formulaic Academicism is Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, an *Immortel*, art critic, and professor at the Collège de France. In fact, one may be tempted to read the Goncourts' *Journal* as a *Contre Sainte-Beuve avant la lettre*, since the brothers go out of their way to ridicule the critic's formalism and hackneyed didacticism, depicting him as a hypocrite who directs harsh critiques at Hugo's and Flaubert's work. Though it would be erroneous to form an opinion of Sainte-Beuve's character based on Edmond and Jules's *Journal* (abounding in unflattering remarks about their contemporaries), this text does provide an extensive overview of the nineteenth century, which should not be overlooked.

[25] In "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Clement Greenberg treats Courbet as the "first real avant-garde painter" who "took for his subject matter prosaic contemporary life." Moreover, Greenberg notes that the painter "tried to demolish official bourgeois art by turning it inside out" (29). Regarding the dichotomy of Romanticism/ Realism, Philippe Dufour notes in *Le Réalisme de Balzac à Proust* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998) that "sous le Second Empire, une série d'oppositions se met définitivement en place qui va structurer les polémiques: d'un côté réalisme, matérialisme, positivisme; de l'autre idéalisme, fantaisie, imagination. Réalisme devient l'antonyme de romantisme" (5).

In his article from 1850 entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?" Sainte-Beuve provides a paradoxical definition, one that the Goncourts took as a counter example. Sainte-Beuve's definition is afflicted by irreconcilable internal oppositions, which proves that he was on the verge of elaborating his own view of Academic principles, situated half way between *ut pictura poesis*, which exalts didacticism, and Romanticism, which commends the virtues of invention and the importance of an individual style. Sainte-Beuve's oscillation is determined by nineteenth-century changes in the doctrine of the sister arts. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Académie française imposed the doctrine of the sister arts -- *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting is poetry), inspired by Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica* -- onto the visual arts and literature. Rensselaer Lee argues in his seminal work *Ut pictura poesis* that at the end of the eighteenth century, however, painting and writing started affirming their independence from one another (68). With the advent of Romanticism, the artist's personality became the central source of inspiration: "the romantic imagination had outlawed the rational art of an earlier day, (…) nature no longer signified selected beauty or universal truth, (…) genius had rejected forever the guiding hand of the rules" (Lee 32). This makes Sainte-Beuve's definition unstable:

> Un vrai classique, [...] c'est un auteur qui a enrichi l'esprit humain, qui en a réellement augmenté le trésor, qui lui a fait faire un pas de plus, qui a découvert quelque vérité morale non équivoque, ou ressaisi quelque passion éternelle dans ce cœur où tout semblait connu et exploré ; qui a rendu sa pensée, son observation ou son invention, sous une forme n'importe laquelle, mais large et grande, fine et sensée, saine et belle en

> soi ; qui a parlé à tous dans un style à lui et qui se trouve aussi celui de tout le monde, dans un style nouveau sans néologisme, nouveau et antique, aisément contemporain de tous les âges. (qtd. in Compagnon, "Le Classique," 6-7)

Sainte-Beuve's definition moves from general traits -- clarity of style, accurate rendition of human emotions, a claim to accuracy and verisimilitude -- to very specific critical clichés propagated by the Académie française in its desire to preserve the purity of the French language.[26] These include a complete abstention from the use of neologisms, a stylistic trait that Edmond de Goncourt will directly address in the preface to his novel *Chérie*.

Edmond's definition of the Goncourtian style is eccentric, celebrating originality, lack of clarity, and the amalgamation of genres (poetry, prose, painting); in this style, art is directed at destabilizing both stylistic clichés and a strict hierarchy of genres. Edmond affirms that:

> Non, le romancier, qui a le désir de se survivre, continuera à s'efforcer de mettre dans sa prose de la poésie, continuera à vouloir un rythme et une cadence pour ses périodes, continuera à rechercher l'image peinte, continuera à courir après l'épithète rare, continuera … à combiner dans une expression le *trop* et *l'assez* … continuera à ne pas rejeter un vocable comblant un trou parmi les rares mots admis à monter dans les carrosses

[26] The use of neologisms is still a sensitive issue for the French Academy. The Academy's website has a section dedicated to this topic entitled "Terminologie et néologie" that offers a series of French variants to the Anglo-Saxon words having entered the lexicon. For instance, the website recommends using the syntagm "informatique à nuage" instead of the Anglo-Saxon neologism "cloud computing."

de l'Académie, commettra enfin, mon Dieu, oui ! un néologisme.

(*Préfaces* 69)

By using the circumlocution "le romancier, qui a le désir de se survivre," Edmond shows his reluctance to use the adjective "classique" that had lost, in the 1880s, its polemic effect. His theoretical discourse is a skillful catalogue of literary techniques that undermine the Academic doctrine of purity of the language: "mettre dans sa prose de la poésie," "vouloir un rythme et une cadence," "rechercher l'image peinte… l'épithète rare… un néologisme." According to Edmond, literature that survives its author is a mixed genre, encompassing different artistic media (text and image) and styles (archaisms and neologisms). As such, Edmond's manifesto of *écriture artiste* as an ideology on art is a response to Sainte-Beuve's interpretation of legitimate art. If we consider rhetorical devices, Edmond's sentence structure is in the negative, as if offering a response to an existent discourse. Sainte-Beuve's syntagm "un style à lui et qui se trouve aussi celui de tout le monde," a concept that has a positive connotation for the critic. However, Edmond ridicules the critic in his anti-Academic declamation where he advises artists to steer clear of populism and avoid "les rares mots admis à monter dans les carrosses de l'Académie." Ultimately, the Goncourtian theory on anti-Academic style advocates for amalgamation -- "combiner dans une expression le *trop* et *l'assez*" -- and peculiarity (eccentricity) as a response to literary clichés.[27] This conceptualization echoes Delacroix's pictorial theory in which he combines, as Petra Chu notes, "the simplicity of

[27] In "Le Classique" Antoine Compagnon defines "l'œuvre classique," understood in the broad sense of a pivotal literary production, "non pas comme l'œuvre intemporelle mais comme l'œuvre discordante dans tout present" (7). This definition, thus contradicts Sainte-Beuve's literary theory.

effect" with the "richness of color and texture" ("'A Science and an Art at Once': Delacroix's Pictorial Theory and Practice 107).

Edmond and Jules's rather elitist defense of a personal style that is not that of everyone else, as Sainte-Beuve suggests, is further supported by a remark from the *Journal* (March 2, 1869) in which the brothers dissect Sainte-Beuve's opprobrium of their intemperate style ("allant toujours à l'excès") from *Madame Gervaisais*:

> Eh bien, vous, n'est-ce pas ? c'est encore autre chose que vous voulez ! C'est du mouvement dans la couleur, comme vous dites, de l'âme des choses. C'est impossible... Je ne sais pas, moi, comme on prendra cela plus tard, où on ira. Mais, voyez-vous, pour vous, il vous faut atténuer, amortir.' [...] Et puis partant par une tangente inattendue de colère : '*Neutre-alteinte*, qu'est-ce que c'est que ça *neutre-alteinte*? Ce n'est pas dans le dictionnaire, c'est une expression de peintre. Tout le monde n'est pas peintre !... C'est comme un ciel *couleur rose-thé*… De rose-thé ! Qu'est-ce qui sait ce que c'est qu'une rose-thé ?[…] 'Et cependant, monsieur Sainte-Beuve, si j'ai voulu exprimer que le ciel était jaune, de la nuance jaune rosée d'une rose-thé, d'une *Gloire de Dijon* par exemple, et n'était pas du tout du rosé de la nuance de la rose ordinaire? (*J* 8: 179)

The conversation between the Goncourts and Sainte Beuve is structured around the major concepts conveyed in the above-mentioned definitions of style, opposing to the Sainte-Beuvian formalism an approach based on a brand of creativity that reveals the distinctive temperament of its creator. Sainte-Beuve was disturbed by the use of uncommon lexical juxtapositions and jargon such as "neutralteint," which he believed impeded

comprehension, making this literary production unavailable to a large public. Contrary to Sainte-Beuve's desire for a large audience, the aristocratic Goncourts believed that the opprobrium of the masses guaranteed the real artist' talent. Another trait that troubled the Academician was the amalgamation of the arts -- music, literature, and painting receiving equal textual standing. This "multi-generic discourse" (133), to use Richard Bradford's syntagm from *Stylistics*, corroded the Academic formal dimension which, according to Sainte-Beuve, should be "fine et sensée, saine et belle en soi" (42). Bradford notes that the "linguistic competence of novel writing is acquired partly through the awareness of how other novelists have variously shaped and distorted registers of ordinary language" (92). His argument ties in with the Goncourtian propensity for excess, which amounts to a very recognizable personal style that unsettled Academic literary conventions and practices.

Like the Goncourts, Delacroix is also part of a conversation with Sainte-Beuve. He provides his own definition of classicism in a journal entry dated January 19, 1857. Reproducing an excerpt from his *Dictionnaire philosophique des beaux-arts,* Delacroix, as a newly elected member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, feels compelled, like both Sainte-Beuve and the Goncourts, to expound on his personal view and contribute to popular debates on painting. "No other artist" states Michèle Hannoosh, "ever reflected so extensively on the theoretical relation between the arts, or linked this reflection to his own writing about them" (154). Yet similarly to Sainte-Beuve, the painter's definition is unstable, fluctuating between compliance with tradition, which for him entails "l'observation des lois du goût," and the compulsion to express individual talent, by understanding the ideals of antiquity and filtering this essence through the artist's

personality: “pénétrer l’esprit de l’antique et de joindre cette étude à celle de la nature” (Delacroix, *Journal* 1079). Delacroix differentiates between two types of classical art: the genuine Greek and Roman art of the antiquity, which relies on the artist’s creativity, and an institutional type of classical art, equated with the school of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), the Neoclassical Academic painter, which relied heavily on formulaic practices:[28]

> L’École de David s’est qualifiée à tort d’école classique par excellence, bien qu’elle se fonde sur l’imitation de l’antique. C’est précisément cette imitation souvent peu intelligente et exclusive qui ôte à cette école le principal *caractère* des écoles classiques, qui est la durée. Au lieu de pénétrer l’esprit de l’antique et de joindre cette étude à celle de la nature, on voit qu’il a été l’écho d’une époque où on avait la fantaisie de l’antique. (*Journal* 1079-1080)

Delacroix’s discourse, like that of the Goncourts, is a refutation of the Academy’s rigid and unnatural imitation of the “antique.” According to Delacroix, David’s classical style, and by extension the Academic style that he supports, is a “fantaisie de l’antique,” a mimesis of the ancients, devoid of the skill and genius, thus unworthy of the title *classic*. Delacroix’s style, on the other hand, deftly intermingles the subtleties of classical antiquity (its “caractère”) with certain characteristics of contemporaneity. In an entry from January 29, 1857, Delacroix supports his previous thesis by adding this very concise explanation: “Asservissement au modèle dans David. Je lui oppose Géricault, qui imite également, mais plus librement, et met plus d’intérêt” (1092). Théodore Géricault (1791

[28] In his article “Ingres versus Delacroix,” Shelton connects the “stiff artificialities of David’s style” with the Academic teachings (note 8, 739).

–1824), on the other hand, was one of Delacroix's sources of inspiration, and critics have pointed out the aesthetic similarity between the nudes from the former's *Raft of Medusa* and the latter's *Dante and Virgil.*[29] In these works, Gericault and Delacroix propose an alternative to the Academic history painting, opting for what James Rubin calls "less traditional sources" (49).

To further his argument about what a classic should be, Delacroix reverts to literary models, indicating another similarity to the Goncourts, in the sense that the three of them think outside the boundaries of their own medium, theorizing on literature and painting at once. Delacroix references Stendhal's famous comparison between Racine and Shakespeare.[30] In his view, the English playwright, although not a classic by French Academic standards, is a great artist because his art does not imitate simplistic patterns: "Son art d'ailleurs, est complètement à lui" (1079). In fact, there is a strong equivalence between the structural patterns of Shakespearean style, as described by Delacroix, and the extravagances of Goncourtian aesthetics, as conceptualized by Sainte-Beuve. Shakespeare's "parties admirables" that cannot "sauver et rendre acceptables ses longueurs," and his "jeux de mots continuels, ses descriptions hors de propos" (Delacroix 1079) are reminiscent of the Goncourtian *écriture artiste,* that seeks to render the "mouvement dans la couleur" by means of extensive descriptions, unconventional

[29] In "Delacroix's *Dante and Virgil* as a Romantic Manifesto: Politics and Theory in the Early 1820s," James Rubin remarks that "our experience of the *Dante and Virgil* is certainly one of Michelangelism, even if obviously mediated by Gericault and Rubens" (51). Regarding the filiation between Delacroix and Gericault, see Chapters V and VI of Walter Friedlaender's book *David to Delacroix* (1952).

[30] In Stendhal's 1823 essay "Racine et Shakespeare," the writer defends Romanticism by stating that classics such as Racine were considered romantics in their time. For an in-depth analysis of this theme, read Antoine Compagnon's essay *Le Classique* (Web, *Collège de France*).

stylistics, eccentric lexicon, and the use of figurative language. Yet Delacroix's hardly complimentary remark on the lack of classicism of Shakespearean style masks his praise for the great master, whose works have served as inspiration for many of his own paintings and lithographs.[31]

In a *Journal* entry from January 12, 1860, the Goncourts cite Flaubert's standpoint on classicism as an artificial construction influenced by Academic institutions:

> Oui, la forme qu'est-ce qui dans le public est réjoui et satisfait par la forme ? Et notez que la forme est ce qui vous rend suspect à la justice, aux tribunaux, qui sont classiques… Mais personne n'a lu les classiques! Il n'y a pas huit hommes de lettres qui aient lu Voltaire, j'entends *lu*. Pas cinq qui sachent les titres des pièces de Thomas Corneille?... Mais l'image, les classiques en sont pleins ! La tragédie n'est qu'images. (*J* 3 : 204)

Flaubert's definition of the classics bears a strong resemblance to that of Delacroix, addressing both the instability of the definition of "classicism" and re-appropriating some of the aesthetic features of canonical authors into his own stylistics. If Stendhal and Delacroix maintain that Racine was a Romantic for his contemporaries, Flaubert claims that Corneille's works lack the clarity and restraint that the Académie française associates with classicism. Flaubert's comment reflects Lee's argument from *Ut pictura poesis* that the Académie française adopted an extreme conceptualization of the mimetic doctrine, and instead of adapting its precepts to contemporary life, it cultivated the idolatry of the

[31] I am referring here to *Self Portrait as Hamlet*, *Hamlet and his Mother*, *Hamlet and Horatio in the Cemetery*, *Macbeth and the Witches, Romeo and Juliet at the Tomb of the Capulets,* among others.

productions of Greek and Roman antiquity that "only the deeper understanding of a Poussin could save from empty formalism" (12).

This exploration of Sainte-Beuve's and Delacroix's definitions of classicism reveals the controversies related to the Academic "empty formalism" of the 1850s, and indicates a tendency to negotiate a definition of the classic, placed between Academic and non-Academic affiliations. If Sainte-Beuve advocates clarity, rationality, restraint, universality, and accessibility, the painter (like the Goncourts), leans towards immoderation, lavishness, hybridity, and imagination. Delacroix notes in his Journal that in choosing Shakespearean verse over the coldness and dryness of Jacques-Louis David's dogmatism, he stretches the boundaries of classicism and romanticism. According to Delacroix, David was an Academic, rather than a classic artist, by which he meant that David imitated the classics instead of putting forth an innovative style (1079). In turn, Sainte-Beuve glosses over the internal inconsistencies of his equivocal definition in order to make it fit his universalist and Academic argument that a classic is both "nouveau et antique," and therefore "aisément contemporain de tous les âges" (42). In this debate, the Goncourts situate their idiosyncratic style, *écriture artiste*, in opposition to Sainte-Beuve's conceptualization of art that should be accessible to a large audience. They articulate their anti-Academic by cultivating artifice, excess, and an amalgamation of prose, poetry, and painting, practices which are also observed in Flaubert's *Salammbô*, Zola's *L'Œuvre* and Huysmans' *A rebours*. In view of these volatile definitions it becomes clear that, during the nineteenth century, both Academic and anti-Academic artists, including Flaubert, Delacroix, and the Goncourts, profess their admiration for the classics, albeit while conceiving of the classics in completely different terms.

Delacroix, the Official Painter

As I have pointed out throughout this chapter, and as various critics have observed, Eugène Delacroix's position to the Institut des Beaux Arts was ambivalent, since Delacroix was both a part of this official institution and on its margins. For instance, in "Delacroix's Dialogue with the French Classical Tradition" Dorothy Johnson notes the equivocal views of Delacroix in relation to the Academic doctrines. "Janus-like" she writes, "the painter looked continuously to the past as well as to the future," reinterpreting motifs and techniques from Michelangelo, Rubens and Goya into his particular visual universe (109). It is noteworthy to point out, with Johnson, that Michelangelo and Rubens had only been accepted into the French "classical cannon" during the nineteenth century (112). A study of Delacroix's *Journal* reveals a very unique personality, with a unique situation in artistic society: an avid reader of Rousseau; a lover of the opera; an admirer of painters who had, until recently, been rejected from the cannon; an intimate friend of the revolutionary artists of his time such as Théodore Géricault, George Sand, Chopin, and Baudelaire; the famous rival of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and the contester of Jacques-Louis David's neoclassicism; one of the prominent figures of the Romantic school who referred to himself as a Classic; a member of the controversial Salon jury; and a prominent member of the Conseil Municipal, established by Baron Haussmann (*Journal* 33).[32]

[32] Antonin Proust relates a discussion between Manet and Baudelaire, in which Manet complains about the fact that his painting *Le Buveur d'absinthe* had been refused from the Salon of 1859; at the same time, Manet is encouraged at the thought that Delacroix appreciated it: "Ce qui me console, c'est que Delacroix l'a trouvé bien. Car on me l'a affirmé, Delacroix l'a trouvé bien. C'est un autre rapin que Couture, Delacroix. Je n'aime pas son métier. Mais c'est un Monsieur qui sait ce qu'il veut et qui le fait comprendre. C'est quelque chose cela" (*Édouard Manet,*

The distinction between the denominations "official" and "Academic" is instrumental to my argument regarding Delacroix's anti-Academic sensibility. In *The Academy and the French Painting* Boime explains that "what was acceptable to official taste at given moments was antithetical to Academic preference" (Boime 15). In fact, Delacroix received numerous state commissions in spite of his notorious "sketch-like" technique that undermined the doctrine of "classic clarity of form" (Boime 10).[33] Among the various important state commissions that Delacroix secured, the most noteworthy are the ceiling of the library at the Assemblée Nationale; the ceiling of the Salon de la Paix from the Hotel de Ville in Paris; and the Chapelle des Saints-Anges in the Parisian church Saint-Sulpice, a project he finished in 1861, two years prior to his death. Moreover, notwithstanding Delacroix's brilliant debut at the Salon of 1822 with *The Barque of Dante and Virgil Crossing the River Styx,* as well as the fact that he was eventually elected a member of the Académie, his work did not fit the Neoclassical Academic formulas regarding the rules on the clarity of drawing and the finished aspect, and was denounced by contemporary critics including Maxime du Camp and Etienne-Jean Delécluze.[34] Johnson argues that while the composition of *The Barque* respected academic codes such as the "shallow, rectangular… space of the Neoclassical format" Delacroix's use of a vivid palette and a "freer brush style" marked his independence from Academic conventions (112). Works such as *The Massacre at Chios* (1824), *The Death*

Souvenirs 1897 [1913], 33 qtd. Leribault, "'Le Romantisme, c'est le véritable art moderne,' *La Fabrique de l'Hommage* 70).

[33] Further references to this edition will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *La Peinture*.

[34] See Dorothy Johnson's article "Delacroix's Dialogue with the French Classical Tradition" pp. 108-129.

of Sardanapalus (1827-28), *The Lion Hunt* (1854) and others were the subjects of artistic polemics and public scandals. "Jamais artiste ne fut plus attaqué, plus ridiculisé, plus entravé," remarks Baudelaire, his great defender and lifelong friend, in his critique of the 1855 Exposition Universelle (*OC* 2:591). This gripping statement, which, as I have suggested earlier, is also a projection of Baudelaire's personal frustrations onto his friend Delacroix's fate, is nonetheless accurate.

In part, this is because these groundbreaking works reflect Delacroix's independence from the Academic precepts of clarity of drawing, restraint, didacticism, and even decency (if we think of the sadism and unbridled passion depicted in *Sardanapalus*). They also display the acute tendency of the painter to alternate canonical Greco-Roman iconography with non-canonical sources of inspiration.[35] Intense emotions, ranging from determination to suffering, to despair and resignation emanate from the frantic poses of the contorted male, female, and animal bodies represented in movement. The overall effect is amplified by the use of a very vivid, almost un-naturalistic color palette, which shocked most of Delacroix's contemporaries and earned him the title of *coloriste* (conceived of as a positive quality by Baudelaire). In his critique of the 1855 Exposition Universelle, Baudelaire professes his admiration of the expressivity of Delacroix's paintings, and commends the painter's ability to use color and movement in order to establish an immediate connection with the viewer. "Jamais," affirms the poet, "couleurs plus belles, plus intenses, ne pénétrèrent jusqu'à l'âme par le canal des yeux" (*OC* 2: 594). Baudelaire is drawn to Delacroix's originality, and to his power to filter the styles of great masters such as Rubens, Rembrandt, Veronese, and Lebrun, selecting

[35] The catalogue of Academic traits is inspired by Rensselaer Lee's seminal work *Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (17-62).

carefully the elements that appeal to his personal aesthetic philosophy; for Baudelaire, these qualities make him "un artiste unique, sans générateur, sans précédent" (2: 597-8).

In their art criticism of the 1855 Exposition Universelle, the Goncourts are less enthusiastic about Delacroix's style than Baudelaire, who sees in the painter a kindred spirit. The Goncourts, as admirers of the more subdued palette of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, object to Delacroix's use of vivid colors. "Coloriste," remark the Goncourts, " M. Delacroix est un coloriste puissant, mais un coloriste à qui a été refusé la qualité suprême des coloristes: l'harmonie"(41). Moreover, their preference for landscape painting over the Academically acclaimed history painting (what they call the "grandes machines,"44), the latter being a genre revered by Delacroix, created a rift between these artists and the great master, who is for them first and foremost "l'élève de Rubens" (44).[36]

Beyond these divergences, Edmond and Jules praise Delacroix's originality, creativity, and innovation. For Edmond and Jules, Delacroix is "l'imagination de la peinture du dix-neuvième siècle" (44). The Goncourts admire Delacroix's creativity and his artistic potential, and believe that his work goes beyond the trite didactic formulas of the Academy. In his treatment of these "grandes machines," Delacroix proposes a very expressive, idiosyncratic style, rendering the dramatic aspect of a scene by depicting characters engaging in exacerbated movements, movements that the canvas seems incapable of containing:

> L'action est le génie, le *démon* de M. Delacroix. Dérober le geste, ravir la silhouette animée de la créature, conquérir le mouvement, jeter, captive,

[36] In their art criticism of the 1855 Exposition, Edmond and Jules proclaim that "Le paysage est la victoire de l'art moderne. Il est l'honneur de la peinture du dix-neuvième siècle" (18).

> sur la toile la mobilité humaine ; pousser le tableau à cette violence des choses : le drame ; remuer, agiter, enfiévrer la ligne, comme pour dépasser dans l'imagination du spectateur le moment, la seconde, où la vie du fait a été subitement figée, pour ainsi dire, -- voilà les inspirations et les ambitions de M. Delacroix, sa voie et son renom. (*La Peinture* 39)

Like Baudelaire, the Goncourts are impressed by Delacroix's ability to capture the essence of a dynamic scene and to animate his characters in such a way that this impression of life lingers in the viewer's imagination, independently of the proximity of the painting. Delacroix's tendency to "remuer, agiter, enfiévrer la ligne" liberates this form from the Academic constraint of polished drawing, thus subverting the revered doctrine of the "fini" -- what Boime calls the "dutifully finished pictorial surface" (20). The Goncourts share with Baudelaire and Delacroix the view that art endures through the effect it produces on the reader/spectator. "Il en est des poèmes comme des tableaux," proclaim Edmond and Jules in a *Journal* entry from January 29, 1857, "Ils ne doivent pas être trop finis: le grand art est l'effet, n'importe comment on le produit." In their view, in order to maintain the vivid interest of the public, an artwork should allow for some degree of imprecision, of *non-fini,* which intrigues. Similarly, in "Questions sur le beau," an article published on July 15, 1854 in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, Delacroix acknowledges that his main artistic goal is to render to the spectator an overall impression, unhindered by the percepts of "l'exécution savante" (31).

In a *Journal* entry from September 30, 1855, Delacroix further expresses his disdain for the constraining effects of Academic doctrines on the originality of the

individual artist. He praises the genius of the creator who can find his own style, and thus recommends moderation in copying the technique of the great masters:

> Les écoles n'enseignent guère autre chose : quel maître peut communiquer son sentiment personnel ? On ne peut lui prendre que ses recettes ; la pente de l'élève à s'approprier promptement cette facilité d'exécution, qui est chez l'homme de talent le résultat de l'expérience, dénature la vocation et ne fait en quelque sorte qu'enter un arbre sur un arbre d'espèce différente. Il y a de robustes tempéraments d'artistes qui absorbent tout, qui profitent de tout ; bien qu'élevés dans des manières que leur nature ne leur eût pas inspirées, ils retrouvent leur route à travers les préceptes et les exemples contraires, profitent de ce qui est bon et, quoique marqués quelquefois d'une certaine empreinte d'école, deviennent des Rubens, des Titien, des Raphael. Il faut absolument que dans un moment quelconque de leur carrière, ils arrivent, non pas à mépriser tout ce qui n'est pas eux, mais à dépouiller complètement ce fanatisme presque toujours aveugle qui nous pousse tous à l'imitation des grands maîtres et à ne jurer que par leurs ouvrages. Il faut se dire, cela est bon pour Rubens, ceci pour Raphael, Titien ou Michel-Ange ; ce qu'ils ont fait les regarde ; rien ne m'enchaîne à celui-ci ou à celui-là. Il faut apprendre à se savoir gré de ce qu'on a trouvé ; une poignée d'inspiration naïve est préférable à tout. (956)

In Delacroix's conception, the "écoles," a thinly veiled allusion to the Académie française, are detrimental to the artist's freedom. Indoctrinating the artist and encouraging

an unnatural reverence for stereotypical formulas ("recettes") taken from the great masters, the formulaic nature of Academic stylistic conventions perverts ("dénature[ent]") the creator's natural talent and original inclinations. The prescriptive character of this revolutionary proclamation for individual freedom is exemplified through Delacroix's use of verbs such as "mépriser," "dépouiller," and "juger," and reinforced by his repetition of the impersonal construction with a modal verb, expressing necessity and obligation -- "il faut." His injunction is constructed around the dichotomy separating "l'homme de génie" from the talentless imitator. According to Delacroix's activist vision, the real artist acquires the attributes of a rebellious hero, endowed with a robust artistic temperament; he breaks his chains of servitude to the "grands maîtres" and is able to find his own way ("route"), a metaphor referring to a personal and original manner, like that of Rubens, Titian, and Raphael. The artist's antagonist is the fanatic imitator who, devoid of the "poignée d'inspiration" necessary to produce a masterpiece, is condemned to mechanically reproduce the style of the masters, without perceiving its essence, thus remaining in a state of servitude.

The passage expounds in writing the same rebellious verve and common tropes as Delacroix's famous painting *Liberty guiding the people* (1830), the emblem of the July Revolution, depicting a female figure leading men into battle as the allegory of freedom. To extrapolate, Delacroix envisages the heroic artist, the "grand maître," as an allegory of freedom and inspiration who leads the apprentice in his search for his own personal style. Delacroix's remark that "une poignée d'inspiration naïve est préférable à tout" represents the quintessential preoccupation of his opus, namely the defense of genuine artistic flair.

His preoccupation is equivalent to the Goncourtian anti-Academic proposition, which advocates for a personal style, attesting to the artist's ingenuity.

Bearing in mind their own aesthetic philosophy – that of *écriture artiste* -- the Goncourts provide a definition of their artistic doctrine that is homologous to that of Delacroix: "ce sceau rare et merveilleux, cette marque d'invention, de propriété, de personnalité; cette franche et inimitable signature du génie!" (*La Peinture*, 45). In Delacroix's *Journal*, as well as in his essays on art, "Questions sur le Beau" (1854) and "Des variations du Beau" (1857), Delacroix expresses his admiration of the artist's temperament, that he conceives of, similarly to the Goncourts, as a "franche et inimitable signature du génie" residing outside the dogmatisms of the official schools. In "Questions sur le Beau," Delacroix subverts Academic conformity by theorizing a more liberal conceptualization of art, in which artistic quality is based solely on the particularity of the work's creator: "Un génie sorti de terre, un homme inconnu et privilégié va renverser cet échafaudage de doctrines à l'usage de tout le monde et qui ne produisent rien" (25).

This passage brings to mind Delacroix's painting *Michelangelo in his Studio* (1849-50), in which the "génie sorti de terre," seated, in a contemplative posture, rests his arm on a table next to the foot of a massive statue (probably representing Moses), and looks outward, thinking of his next masterpiece (*Rebels and Martyrs* 78). For Delacroix, Michelangelo, whose chisel lays lifeless at his feet, is first and foremost a philosopher, an intellectual who refuses to follow a series of "doctrines à l'usage de tout le monde," and who ruminates on his own critical discourse. In "Des variations du Beau," Delacroix asserts that an artist is charismatic because he is unique. This quality allows him to reveal unpredictable things ("cette face nouvelle des choses révélées par lui [the artist] nous

étonne autant qu'elle nous charme"), things which, in turn, provide a deeper understanding of life (54).

Delacroix did not take technical and thematic experimentation to extremes, unlike the younger generation, and the work of Manet and Cézanne for instance. Yet, because of his promotion of alternative sources of inspiration going beyond the Greco-Roman mythology; his constant endorsement of artistic originality, independent of Academic pedantry; and his professed disdain for bourgeois utilitarianism and conventionalism, which he deemed responsible for the mediocrity of the arts in his time, the master's work has left an impact on generations of artists.[37] Some of the most famous tributes to Delacroix and his artistic vision are Baudelaire's essay "L'Œuvre et la vie d'Eugene Delacroix," Fantin Latour's painting *Hommage à Delacroix* (1864), and Cézanne's *Apotheosis of Delacroix* (1890-94), all of which express, beyond any claim of artistic idolatry, the reverence of a set of original artists for an equally unique and thus respected predecessor.[38]

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[37] In "Questions sur le beau" Delacroix states: "On a raison de trouver que l'imitation de l'antique est excellente, mais c'est parce qu'on y trouve observées les lois qui régissent éternellement tous les arts, c'est-à-dire l'expression dans la juste mesure, le naturel et l'élévation tout ensemble; que, de plus, les moyens pratiques de l'exécution sont les plus sensés, les plus propres à produire l'effet. Ces moyens peuvent être employés à autre chose qu'à reproduire sans cesse les dieux de l'Olympe, qui ne sont plus les nôtres, et les héros de l'antiquité" (33). In an entry from his *Dictionnaire des Beaux-Arts,* under the entry "décadence," Delacroix notes: "L'absence du goût général, la richesse arrivant graduellement aux classes moyennes, l'autorité de plus en plus impérieuse d'une stérile critique dont le propos est d'encourager la médiocrité et de décourager les grands talents, la pente des esprits dirigée vers les sciences utiles, les lumières croissantes qui effarouchent les choses de l'imagination, toutes ces causes réunies condamnent fatalement les arts à être de plus en plus soumis au caprice de la mode et à perdre toute élévation" (55).

[38] Leribault notes in "D'un hommage à l'autre" that, "Loin d'être de simples exercices d'admiration féodale comme pourraient le suggérer leurs titres, l' 'hommage' façon Fantin ou l' 'apothéose' selon Cézanne ont une fonction prophylactique: ils mettent en avant une reconnaissance officielle qui vaut quitus pour defender l'originalité de leurs auteurs" (139).

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's Clashes with Academia

The beginning of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's literary career was marked by a clash with the Academic institutions of the 1850s, a resistance which permeated Edmond and Jules' opus and which culminated with the establishment of L'Académie des Goncourt (1900) which later became L'Académie Goncourt, as an alternative to the official institution. In the winter of 1851, Pierre-Charles, comte de Villedeuil and Edmond and Jules's cousin, an aristocrat who harbored very strong republican views, proposed that he and the young writers found together a leftist literary and artistic journal called *L'Éclair.*[39] The Goncourts note, in a journal entry from December 15, 1851, that Villedeuil thought up a provocative frontispiece: an illustration of a lightning bolt striking the Academy "avec les noms de Hugo, de Musset, de Sand dans les zigzags de l'éclair." Despite the fact that this title page was later censored, these young artists, who affiliated themselves with the literary avant-garde, continued the pursuit of an anti-Academic agenda, consisting of the "assassinat du classicisme," by which they meant the Academic classical tradition (*Journal,* January 1852).

In January 1853 Villedeuil and the Goncourts founded a second literary journal, the *Paris,* and collaborated with other young, aspiring, and unconventional artists such as Murger, Banville, Karr, and Aurélien Scholl, to name a few. That same year, the Goncourts and Karr were prosecuted for having inserted obscene verses in their article "Voyage du n° 43 de la rue Saint-Georges au n° 1 de la rue Laffitte." In their defense, Edmond and Jules pointed out that they had quoted the verse of Tahureau from an

[39] In a journal entry from January 1852, the Goncourts refer to the *Éclair* as a "Revue hebdomadaire de la Littérature, des Théâtres et des Arts" (*J* 1:51).

anthology of sixteenth-century poetry and theater published by Sainte-Beuve, a work "couronné par l'Académie" (*Journal,* February 20, 1853). They were acquitted on all counts of attacking public morality, yet this experience became a leitmotif throughout their *Journal,* allowing them to pose as artistic rebels who reject the *status quo* and who are fervent supporters of "littérature anticlassique," which they equated with a "littérature révolutionnaire" (*Journal,* July 27, 1853). In a journal entry from December 1860, the Goncourts bitterly remark that: "Il est vraiment curieux que ce soient les quatre hommes les plus purs de tout métier et de tout industrialisme, les quatre plumes les plus entièrement vouées à l'art, qui aient été traduits sur les bancs de la police correctionnelle: Baudelaire, Flaubert et nous."(*Journal*, December 27, 1860). By affiliating themselves with Baudelaire and Flaubert, whose controversial trials for *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Madame Bovary*, respectively, had sparked public interest and spirited debates, the Goncourts try to set themselves apart from bourgeois prudishness and hypocritical mores, and signal their desire to create a more realistic depiction of contemporary life.[40]

In the context of an artistic market driven by the dealer-critic model, the Goncourts defended their artistic integrity by proudly noting that, along with Baudelaire and Flaubert, they were preserving the nobility of art -- "les quatre plumes les plus entièrement vouées à l'art" -- despite institutional disdain and pecuniary interest (*Journal*, December 27, 1860).[41] This condemnation of mercantilism in the domain of the arts

[40] Yvan Lecrerc proposes a very pertinent analysis of the political, social, and historical climate surrounding the nineteenth-century obscenity trials in *Crimes écrits: la littérature en procès au XIXe siècle* (1991).

[41] In *Bohemian Paris*, Jerrold Seigel points out the increasingly commercial aspect of art after the 1789 Revolution and the plummeting of the aristocracy: "For artists and writers [of the nineteenth century], the basic change is as easily summarized as it was often noticed: patronage gave way to the market" (13).

resonates with their sardonic exclamation from *L'Histoire de la société française pendant la Révolution* (1854), "Mort à tout ce qui n'est pas de première utilité, de première nécessité!" Of course, Edmond and Jules, who were themselves aristocratic *rentiers* and thus sheltered from having to make a living through their writing, had the privilege to contemplate from afar the contemporary pragmatic view of art, which should ensure the artists' survival (353).

Their artistic elitism is further expressed in their view of the artist as a man of genius, ahead of his time, who dedicates his life to the noble ideal of art. Unlike Victor Hugo who conceived the man of genius as a leader of (idealized) national masses, the Goncourts portray the artist of genius as a tragic figure, a martyr of his art, disregarded by an insensitive general public and by a group of tyrannical "universitaires":[42]

> La chose que voit avant tout dans la littérature, un universitaire: c'est une fonction, un traitement, et c'est pour cela qu'en général un universitaire n'a pas de talent. La littérature doit être considérée comme une carrière qui ne vous nourrit, ni ne vous loge, ni ne vous chauffe, et où la rémunération est invraisemblable, et c'est seulement quand on considère la

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[42] In the preface to his 1831 play *Marion de Lorme,* Hugo uses the trope of the artist as genius, a charismatic figure able to inspire and educate the people: *"*Ce serait l'heure, pour celui à qui Dieu en aurait donné le génie, de créer tout un théâtre, un théâtre vaste et simple, un et varié national par l'histoire, populaire par la vérité, humain, naturel, universel par la passion*"* (206). Nevertheless, as Olivier Bara notes in *"National, populaire, universel: tensions et contradictions d'un théâtre peuple chez Victor Hugo,"* the writer strives to produce a type of literature that, while maintaining a 'noble' form – the Alexandrine verse -- can still reach out and educate the masses: "...Hugo 'botte en touche' et se sort provisoirement de la contradiction (être 'populaire' sans être 'vulgaire') en misant sur le 'vrai peuple', celui qu'engendrera, qu'agrégera, l'œuvre dans les siècles à venir : non les obscures 'multitudes' présentes, mais un peuple d'élite, 'aggloméré' au fil des générations de lecteurs - un peuple encore inactuel, toujours en puissance, qui sera fécondé par l'œuvre du génie, enfanté et nourri par le Livre ou par un *théâtre peuple* (générateur *du* peuple)" (4).

littérature ainsi, et qu'on y entre, poussé par le diable au corps du sacrifice, du martyre, de l'amour du beau, qu'on peut avoir du talent. (*Journal*, December 11, 1886)

Edmond's reasoning on literature should not, however, be regarded as disinterested within the context of the flourishing market economy of bourgeois society. Even if, for the Goncourts, literature was never envisaged as "une carrière qui … vous nourrit … vous loge, … vous chauffe," the brothers had a very acute understanding of art's symbolic and cultural power. If the earnings from their works were mostly spent on their art collections, described at length in *La Maison d'un artiste* (1881), Edmond turned his hobby into an investment. His art collection was sold in order to fund the Académie des Goncourt, which was meant to legitimate his and his brother's elitist views on art. I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter.

The Hugolian and Goncourtian praise of individual talent that, as I have already noted, is an equally important trope of Delacroix's aesthetics, dates back to Kant. Despite the Goncourtian rejection of the Academic "éternel beau," reminiscent of the Kantian universal beauty, in favor of the less rigid "beau expressif," allowing for individual taste, Edmond and Jules demonstrate great esteem for the philosopher in their view on genius (*Préfaces* 72; *MS* 16).[43] In Kant's philosophical treatise *The Critique of Judgment* (1790),

[43] In *Madame Gervaisais* (1869) the Goncourts pay homage to Kant by turning their main character into an avid reader of his work: "Sur la petite étagère en bois tourné, attachée au mur par quatre tresses de soie jaune, étaient, à portée de sa main, ses livres amis, portant ces noms graves: Dugald-Stewart, Kant, Jouffroy. Il y eut, sous le règne de Louis-Philippe, une petite élite de femmes bourgeoises qui eurent le goût des choses d'intelligence : presque toutes n'ont laissé que la courte mémoire d'un salon étroit, et parfois quelques pages discrètes que relisent des amis. Madame Gervaisais était un exemple et un type de cette race de femmes presque disparue aujourd'hui. Son intelligence, née sérieuse, s'était trouvée portée par la vie vers les études sérieuses" (52-3).

a text that was influential in France during the nineteenth century, the philosopher defines genius as "the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art" (308). According to Kant, true genius "is a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other; hence the foremost property of genius" (308). Kant's defense of "natural endowment" brings to mind both Delacroix's and the Goncourt brothers' denunciation of the superfluous nature of Academic regulations and formulas imposed on the arts, since originality, the main attribute of genius, is innate and cannot be acquired, in the words of Delacroix, through "une fonction" and "un traitement."

If the Goncourtian "amour du beau" (*Journal*, December 11, 1886) is an explicit allusion to the Goncourts' friend and mentor Théophile Gautier's doctrine of "art pour art," which he expounded in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) and illustrated in his poetry collection *Emaux et Camées* (1852), this does not mean that Edmond and Jules' art was devoid of an ideological agenda.[44] The main principles of Gautier's artistic conceptualization were that true art should be both indifferent to material concerns and removed from historical events ("Sans prendre garde à l'ouragan/ Qui fouettait mes vitres fermées/ Moi, j'ai fait *Emaux et Camées*"); instead, its sole purpose should be the quest for beauty (*Préface* 1). Yet the Goncourts *écriture artiste* is a reinterpretation of Gautier's aesthetics. Due to its polemic, anti-Academic nature, *écriture artiste*, as both style and ideology, represents an attempt to faithfully render, comment upon, and ultimately influence the cultural views of their age. "Un des

[44] In "Théophile Gautier and 'l'art pour l'art,'" Aaron Schaffer points out the crucial role of Gautier as the theoretician and the purveyor of the "art pour art" movement: "The man who was, perhaps more than any other single individual, directly responsible for the formulation and the practice of the idea of 'l'art pour l'art' was Théophile Gautier" (405-406).

caractères particuliers de nos romans," note the Goncourts in an entry from January 1861, "ce sera d'être les romans les plus historiques de ce temps-ci, les romans qui fourniront le plus de faits et de vérités vraies à l'histoire morale de ce siècle."[45] Positioning themselves somewhere between historians and novelists, they wished to combine the best of both worlds: factual accuracy rendered in an elaborate form.

If Goncourtian writing represents a distinct aesthetic form, which eludes classifications based on genre and literary movements, my contention is that the main characteristic of their aesthetics, which surpasses all stylistic and ideological contradictions, is the urge to undermine the authority of the established literary institution (the Académie française) and to subvert the credibility of the ruling social class (the bourgeoisie). In the introduction to *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires* (1888), Edmond affirms, retrospectively, that he and his brother have dedicated their life to the defense of creativity and innovation against the stifling influence of the Academy: "les auteurs se sont essayés […] à mettre en relief les grâces et l'originalité des arts mis au ban par les Académies et les Instituts" (VI). The Goncourt brothers achieve this literary subversion, in which they take great pride, by stripping their main characters of their heroic status, and by turning their writings on contemporary society into a series of tableaux that capture the specificity of their own century (Bourget, *Essais de psychologie*

[45] Continuing in the vein of Balzac and similarly to Zola, the Goncourts believed that it is the duty of the writer, in his capacity of privileged observer of the material world, to grasp the essence of the individual and his milieu and to reproduce it in his literature, in order to preserve it for posterity. In the preface to the *Journal*, Edmond writes (speaking in the name of Jules as well), "Donc, notre effort a été de chercher à faire revivre auprès de la postérité nos contemporains dans leur ressemblance animée, à les faire revivre par la sténographie ardente d'une conversation, par la surprise physiologique d'un geste, par ces riens de la passion où se révèle une personnalité, par ce je ne sais quoi qui donne l'intensité de la vie, par la notation enfin d'un peu de cette fièvre qui est le propre de l'existence capiteuse de Paris" (*J* 1 : 30).

contemporaine 157-59). In fact, Paul Bourget sees the Goncourt brothers not as writers, but as social historians, who tirelessly compile "d'innombrables documents sur les habitudes de notre vie quotidienne, sur les singularités de nos métiers, sur nos manières spéciales de nous amuser et de nous vêtir, de travailler et de dépenser notre argent" (159).

Seen in this light, Goncourtian novels (and here I include the novels written by Edmond after the death of Jules) that are immersed in the nineteenth century could be read as historical accounts that compare and contrast contemporary society with an idealized version of the society and culture of the eighteenth century. *Charles Demailly* (1860), an updated version of Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, denounces the corruption of the Parisian literary and journalistic scene; *Renée Mauperin* (1864) denigrates the education received by young bourgeois women; *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865), in which they use a prosaic source of inspiration -- the scandalous life of their maid Rose -- reveals the austere life of the proletariat; *Manette Salomon* (1867) reveals the tribulations of talented artists, disregarded by the public and by official institutions; *La Fille Elisa* (1877) tackles the burning issue of prostitution and is a condemnation of the French penitentiary system; *La Faustin* (1882) is a critique of the Parisian theatrical milieu; and *Chérie* (1884) is a continuation of *Renée Mauperin*, condemning the education of upper-class women who frequent the "monde officiel sous le second Empire" (*Préfaces* 63).[46] By exploring

[46] In *La Création romanesque chez les Goncourt*, Ricatte notes that "Outre les raisons personnelles, les exemples littéraires ont pu jouer, et tout d'abord celui de Balzac. *Un grand home de province à Paris*, le second volume des *Illusions perdues*, publié en 1839, est tout rempli par les exploits et les hontes de Rubempré journaliste" (105). Despite their touching, yet, for the most part exaggerated, portrayal of the miseries of the maid Germinie, and by extension, of the Parisian proletariat, the Goncourts never foster the strong socialist and equalitarian sentiments created/ inspired/ evoked by George Sand and Zola. In a *Journal* entry from July 1857, Edmond and Jules are very vocal about their dislike for the masses, and when Murger introduces them to a group of women from the working class, they abhorrently remark: "Oui, cela est le peuple, cela est le peuple et je le hais dans sa misère, dans ses mains sales … dans son grabat à punaises, dans sa

supposedly vulgar themes, the Goncourts challenged the Academic doctrine of decorum, which, according to Lee, requires "the suitable representation of typical aspects of human life," and advocates for the "conformity to what is decent and proper in taste, and even more in morality and religion" (*Ut pictura poesis* 37). Again, this is not to say that their execrable anti-Semitic tirades from *Manette Salomon* and from their *Journal* should not be considered immoral and vulgar, yet the Académie Française did not take much notice of that. It was Zola, a non-Academic, whose article "Pour les Juifs," published in *Le Figaro* on May 16, 1896, a few months after Edmond's theatrical adaptation of *Manette Salomon*, took a stand against the growing fin-de-siècle anti-Semitism.[47]

Goncourtian literary publications, like the aforementioned polemic verse published in a newspaper article, provoked scandals in their time, and Edmond and Jules considered that these blows to the Academic institution made them "révolutionnaires de la littérature" and guaranteed their renown for posterity (*Journal*, January 10, 1890). When *Charles Demailly* was first published, in the form of a play entitled *Les Hommes de lettres* (never performed due to its "sujet trop dangereux," as Ricatte remarks [108]), Jules Janin wrote a very acid review in the journal *Les Débats,* accusing Edmond and Jules of having betrayed the secrets of their trade. In a journal entry from January 30, 1860, the Goncourts defend themselves, wounded that their audacious attempt has been misinterpreted by the members of their own artistic caste: "Oui, c'est ainsi que le critique [Janin] parle de ce livre, la meilleure et la plus courageuse action de notre vie, ce livre qui

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langue d'argot, dans son orgueil et sa bassesse, dans son travail et sa prostitution, je le hais dans ses vices tout crus, dans sa prostitution toute nue, dans son bouge plein d'amulettes!" (qtd. in Ricatte 252).

[47] For an analysis of the Goncourt's role in the Dreyfus affair see Winock "L'Antisémitisme des Goncourt" p. 198.

ne fait si bas le bas des lettres que pour en faire le haut, plus haut et plus digne de respect." In another example, Charpentier, who read *Germinie Lacerteux* in view of the novel's publication through his publishing house, was outraged by the use of the very graphic term "poux" in the passage describing the heroine's destitute state when arriving in Paris, and replaces it with the more imprecise term "vermine," that is meant to be less disturbing (qtd. Ricatte 251). The Goncourts sought to shock their audience, and the preface to their novel is a warning to their readers, whose expectations will be challenged by the text's disturbing revelations. The authors note proudly that "ce livre," avec sa triste et violente distraction, est fait pour contrarier ses habitudes [du public] et nuire à son hygiène [du public]," obviously referencing rape scenes, domestic violence, and Germinie's masochistic sexual conduct, just to name a few key plot elements (*Préfaces* 19-20).

After the publication of *La Fille Élisa*, Edmond even notes in his *Journal* his distress ("inquiétude anxieuse, bile") at the thought of being sued for licentious literature (March 22, 1876). While attending Princess Mathilde's salon, she inquires about the possibility of his arrest: "De Goncourt, est-ce que vous pouvez être poursuivi?" which provides Edmond the chance to engage in a long tirade about his condition as a martyr of the system (March 28, 1876). Despite the melodramatic nature of his plea, censorship and the institution of legal proceedings against avant-garde artists was indeed a common practice during the nineteenth century. Gautier declared to Edmond and Jules that, in his writing, he only expressed "la moitié du quart de ce que je pense... et encore je risque, à chaque phrase, d'être traîné derrière les tribunaux" *(Journal*, January 20, 1857). In 1860, during a dinner organized by the Goncourts, Flaubert voices a similar disapproval of the

constraints and limitations imposed on artists by the Academic institution, through its insistence on a classical doctrine of restraint and propriety. "Et notez que la forme" says Flaubert, "est ce qui nous rend suspects à la Justice, aux tribunaux qui sont classiques... " (*Journal*, January 12, 1860). According to Flaubert, the creative writer's disregard for the strict Academic guidelines that regulate the French language acquires a strong political significance; in this light, the sanctioning of such works is underserved.

The publication of *Chérie* (1884), Edmond's last novel, which he conceived as a treatise aimed at revolutionizing prose narrative, sparked thematic and stylistic controversies as well as literary disputes over the paternity of the Naturalist movement. [48] *Chérie* pushes to their limits the lax regulations of the genre, by limiting the role of the plot, expanding the role of description, and fusing memoir with social history.[49] On March 4, 1883, Edmond writes in his *Journal* that: "Je cherche dans la 'Petite fille du maréchal' (*Chérie*) quelque chose ne ressemblant plus à un roman. Le manque d'intrigue ne me suffit plus. Je voudrais que la contexture fût différente, que ce livre eût le caractère de Mémoires d'une personne, écrits par une autre..." In fact, according to Edmond this novel should be read as a social and psychological history since it is based on authentic letters, ones that he had requested from his female readers in the preface to *La Faustin* (1882).

Yet, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the detached narrator, who recounts someone else's story, and the authorial voice, who shares the author's personal

[48] In the preface to *Chérie* (written as a literary testament), Edmond appropriates the paternity of the Naturalist movement and the invention of the phrase *document humain*.

[49] In *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, Bourget enumerates several techniques used by the Goncourt brothers that apply perfectly to *Chérie*: the "développement de la partie descriptive" followed by the diminution of "la portion réservée à l'intrigue" (159).

history: “Mon frère et moi nous le disons quelque part, le livre obscène, le livre érotique, n’ont aucune action sur la fille française. Quand elle arrive à se perdre par la lecture, elle se perd par un livre sentimental, par un livre chastement Romanesque. […] Le livre où elle [Chérie] trouvait tout cela, était dans Paul et Virginie qu’on lui permettait de lire, quelques mois après” (112). This passage from Chapter XLIV breaks traditional narrative conventions in establishing a textual relationship that is not predicated upon the narrative itself: the narrator does not have a brother, but the author does. The authorial voice brings into the text the point of view of Jules de Goncourt, who had passed away in 1870. The knowledge of the author’s biography thus becomes instrumental in decoding the fictional text. The narrating voice unexpectedly shifts from telling the story of the Parisian *Chérie,* to becoming part of his own story -- a story that can only be the author’s -- and including Jules in the mix. This, in turn, raises the question of whose “mémoires” are inscribed in the text and who this “autre” writing them might be (*Journal*, March 4, 1883). This intricate point of view is complicated by lengthy descriptions depicting the physiological manifestations of Chérie’s bourgeoning sexual desire. The text becomes oversaturated with arguably superfluous details, ekphrasis, and painterly descriptions. This echoes Flaubert’s technique from *Salammbô* that I will discuss in Chapter III. In the mid 1880s all these elements engendered strong viewpoints from a number of commentators, including Léon Bloy, who raised the question of the novel’s disruptive impact on French literature.[50]

[50] On May 2, 1884, Edmond notes in his *Journal* that the novel had received bad reviews from the Figaro and from several other periodicals: “Maintenant que le *Figaro* [...] a dit: ‘Tue!’ tous les autres journaux, grands et petits, crient: ‘Assomme!’ et c’est un éreintement general…”(*J* 13: 116). On May 6 he proudly remarks, exaggerating the magnitude of his novel’s importance, that *Chérie* has provoked an “international” scandal: “La *Fanfulla* de Rome déclare dans un article

Inspired by the aesthetics of Gautier (their mentor during their collaboration with the periodical *L'Artiste)*, who commended a correspondence between the visual and literary arts, the Goncourts apply this theorem to their literary productions by incorporating painterly techniques into their writing. In a *Journal* entry from June 22, 1889, Edmond confesses that : "je ne peux pas formuler quelque chose, sans que mon écriture soit une façon de dessin, d'où sort mon talent d'écrivain." Edmond problematizes boundaries between literature and the visual arts by supporting the use of varied sources of inspiration, encompassing what Philippe Hamon calls "la non-littérature or "la para-littérature," ranging from "images non-littéraires" to "images populaires, ou industrielles" (*Imageries: Littérature et image au XIXe siècle* 32). The style of *écriture artiste* is a perfect illustration of this nineteenth-century tendency to "'sortir' de la littérature" [Hamon 32], taking literature into uncharted territory, so as to allow the artist complete freedom of expression.

In a *Journal* entry from March 22, 1882, roughly thirty years after his and his brother's literary debut, Edmond is still trying to provide a cohesive formulation of Goncourtian poetics: "Je voudrais trouver des touches de phrases, semblables à des touches de peintre dans une esquisse: des effleurements et des caresses, et, pour ainsi dire, des glacis de la chose écrite, qui échapperaient à la lourde, massive, bêtasse syntaxe des corrects grammairiens." Edmond's theory of *écriture artiste* -- conceptualized as an anti-Academic doctrine on literature – has a programmatic character that can be seen as he enumerates its most prominent features. Edmond indicates its idiosyncratic nature by establishing a reverse theory of *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting so is poetry), in which

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colère, que ma *sénilité* me fait voir des fantasmagories dans le vrai. Au fond c'est un *tolle* européen contre mon livre" (*J* 13: 118).

literature is tributary to painterly techniques and theories, in an effort to "expand the expressive resources of the medium" (Greenberg 30).[51] Secondly, Edmond's attention to the "touches" and "esquisse[s]" is a direct subversion of the Academic doctrine of clarity, or of the painterly "fini" expressed by smooth, polished surfaces. Boime observes that if a painting "failed to exhibit a sufficient degree of finish, it was dismissed as a sketch, unworthy of public display" in the Salon (9). Both Edmond de Goncourt (in consensus with his brother Jules) and Eugène Delacroix consider that it is the immediacy of a work -- its sketchiness, combined with the expressivity of a colorful palette (translated into writing by an evocative style), that enables a dialogue with the reader/spectator and that gives a work its quality.[52]

Additionally, Edmond cultivates the expressive qualities of *écriture artiste* – the "effleurements" and the "caresses" which directly move the audience. The description of the Seine from *Manette Salomon* is a pertinent illustration of both brothers' use of "touches" and "esquisse[s]" expressed through *écriture artiste*:

> Et lentement, ainsi que ces écrans où tournent les tableaux sous des doigts d'enfant, se déroulaient les deux rives, les verdures trouées d'ombre, les

[51] In "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Clement Greenberg affirms that, during the second half of the nineteenth century, French artists became increasingly interested in freeing themselves from the influence of literature. To support his claim he argues that "[t]here is a common effort in each of the arts to expand the expressive resources of the medium, not in order to express ideas and notions, but to express with greater immediacy sensations, the irreducible elements of experience" (30). I am not completely convinced by Greenberg's overgeneralization of the influence of the "art pour art" movement, an argument that I consider incompatible with the aesthetics of the Goncourt brothers aimed at challenging the Academic model. However, I consider Greenberg's thesis to be very accurate regarding the increasing interest of nineteenth-century artists in renewing and broadening the field of literature by appropriating non-literary and non-academic elements.

[52] In "Ingres versus Delacroix" Shelton states that "the Ingres/Delacroix dichotomy was squarely centered on the age-old polarity of line versus color" (738).

> petits bois margés d'une bande d'herbe usée par la marche des dimanches ; les barques aux couleurs vives noyées dans l'eau tremblante, les moires remuées par les yoles attachées, les berges étincelantes, les bords animés de bateaux de laveuses, de chargements de sable, de charrettes aux chevaux blancs. Sur les coteaux, le jour splendide laissait tomber des douceurs de bleu velouté dans le creux des ombres et le vert des arbres ; une brume de soleil effaçait le Mont Valérien […] Souvent aux petites anses herbues, aux places de fraîcheur sous les saules, […] l'équipage se débandait ; la troupe s'éparpillait […] dans une de ces siestes débraillées, […] ne montrant d'une société qu'un morceau de chapeau de paille, un bout de vareuse rouge, un volant de jupon, ce qui flotte et surnage d'un naufrage en Seine. Arrivait le réveil, à l'heure où dans le ciel pâlissant, le blanc doré et lointain des maisons de Paris faisait monter une lumière d'éclairage. (*MS* 1 : 141-2)

This literary tableau reproduces though words and figures of speech the experience of this anti-Academic sketchiness, reminiscent of Delacroix's penchant for the *non-fini* brush strokes (Boime 10). The image of the Seine is suggested, and rapid strokes ("touches") replace harsh lines and definitive contours. The composition is dominated by the dynamic surface of the water, decomposed into an array of unstable reflections. The Goncourts render these aquatic dynamics through a series of poetic syntagms: "vibrant," "miroitant," "reverberation," "rides du courant," "eau tremblante," and "moirés" of the surface, fragmented by the boats. Human beings become secondary to the grandiose scenery. As corrupted, distorted, and ephemeral reflections that adorn the gleaming

surface of the water ("de chair sur les rides du courant"), their role becomes purely decorative. This choice to strip their characters of their "génie exceptionnel" is reminiscent of Bourget's analysis of the Goncourtian aesthetics from *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (157). Another striking element of this literary tableau is the vivid palette that the Goncourts utilize: "flamme miroitante," "verdures trouées d'ombre," "couleurs vives noyées dans l'eau," "bleu velouté dans le creux des ombres" (synesthesia that connects the visual register with the tactile register), "brume de soleil," "blanc des villas brillait," and "reflet de chaire." This explosion of color and light offset by a skillful use of the chiaroscuro technique that affects the entire composition of the literary painting is a combination of Delacroix's audacious palette and the Impressionists' pastel tones.

In his critique of the 1855 *Exposition Universelle*, Baudelaire commends Delacroix's ability to capture, in *La Chasse aux lions,* a stirring and dynamic scene, completely removed from the doctrine of the "ligne dure, cruelle, despotique, immobile, enfermant une figure comme un camisole de force," dictated by Academic drawing (OC 2: 595). Moreover, in comparison, when Edmond uses the metaphor of the "glacis" in his *Journal,* he is demonstrating the palimpsestic nature of his writing. According to the Larousse dictionary, the technique of glazing consists of modifying the tones of the base surface by adding several layers of transparent paint that render the finite product luminous and textured. Figuratively, the metaphor of the glaze reveals a philosophical conceptualization of art, or a proposal to alter the quality of the traditional medium by superposing an embellishing layer, which has a double purpose: to produce a theatrical

effect, and to point out the artificiality of the surface (I will focus on this theme in the chapter on Gustave Flaubert and Gustave Moreau).

The unconventional style of Edmond and Jules maintained a reputation for being pedantic and convoluted beyond the nineteenth century, as seen in Antoine Albalat's interbellum treatise *Comment il ne faut pas écrire: Les ravages du style contemporain* (1921). Albalat dedicates the first chapter to the Goncourts, whom he designates as "dislocateurs du style" (1). A strong supporter and promoter of the classical (seventeenth-century) purity of the French language, Albalat criticizes Edmond's and Jules's preoccupation with altering the set norms of the art of writing:

> Les Goncourt croyaient tout détruire en faisant de la contre-rhétorique et en cherchant avant tout la violence de la sensation. Acrobaties, phrases substantives, locutions bizarres, virtuosités à outrance, caractérisent cette prose prétentieuse, trop flatteusement connue sous le nom *d'écriture artiste* …On ne peut se figurer l'enthousiasme que les Goncourt déchaînèrent, dans la jeunesse de 1880 à 1890, pour les enchevêtrements d'incidentes, les amplifications faciles, le système des retouches, empâtements, répétitions, accumulations d'adjectifs et de participes, poursuite de l'épithète rare et autres excentricités verbales. (2)

Albalat combines a thorough syntactical and morphological analysis of the Goncourtian rhetoric ("phrases substantives," "incidentes," "amplifications," "répétitions," "accumulations d'adjectifs et de participes," etc.) with very personal, even emotional evaluative judgments ("violence," "bizarre," "acrobatie," "prétentieuse," "flatteusement," "excentricités," etc.), converting his grammatical study into a debatable evaluative essay.

Despite the inconsistencies of his critique, however, Albalat makes a significant argument, which is central to my analysis of the Goncourts' anti-Academic tendencies, namely that *écriture artiste* as a doctrine is designed to influence the ability of the younger generation of fin-de-siècle artists to discern what is a "good quality" aesthetic production.

Japonisme as an Expression of Anti-Academicism

Léon Bloy, a novelist and literary critic with Academic aspirations, wrote a series of articles on *Chérie* ("Les Confidences du rien ou la collaboration infinie"), on *En 18..* ("Les Premières plumes d'un vieux Dindon"), and on *La Faustin* ("L'Idole des Mouches"), published between 1884 and 1891, that are a noteworthy example of political and religious discourse being concealed in stylistic criticism. In "Les Confidences du rien ou la collaboration infinie," Bloy emphasizes the trope of "unethical" literature, responsible for the moral decay and corruption of society. While this is an accurate portrayal of the Goncourts' abhorrent anti-Semitic tirades, Bloy overlooks this topic, surprisingly, in view of his nationalist and radical Christian sympathies. Concerned that foreign influences could harm French cultural legacies, he condemns the Goncourts for having introduced a taste for the "infâme art japonais, matériel et futile, comme un art d'esclaves ou de galériens, qui tend à l'effacement et au déshonneur du spirituel génie des races occidentales" (67-8). [53]

[53] Their *Journal* and *Manette Salomon* both contain disturbingly anti-Semitic remarks. Despite the fact that, considered in its entirety, the Goncourtian literary production is not an expression of biological racism; the brothers' lack of openness to the Jewish culture is vexing, considering their arduous defense of alternative cultural models (*Japonisme*, for instance).

Bloy's discourse of exclusion is centered around the conventional dichotomy, propagated since the Early Modern period (and supported by art historians such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann), between high art (Greek and Roman) and low art (Oriental), produced by superior and inferior cultures, respectively. Both the Goncourts and Delacroix subvert (within the limits of figurative art) this classification by means of their aesthetic choices.[54] Edmond and Jules, for example, attack Winckelmann's 1764 *History of Ancient Art*, which commends an Academically endorsed primacy of Greek art over all other artistic productions. "L'art," note the Goncourts in their *Journal*, "n'est pas un, ou plutôt il n'y a pas un seul art. L'art japonais a ses beautés comme l'art grec" (January 10, 1862).[55] Edmond's and Jules' call for artistic renewal, as well as their plea for cultural diversity, is however quite perplexing in light of their notorious anti-Semitism. It becomes obvious that Goncourtian ideology did not extend to an appreciation of the kind of alterity embodied in the Jewish identity.[56] The Goncourts

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[54] This penchant for the art of the Orient echoes Baudelaire's interest in Egyptian and Ninivan cultures, which, in his view, produced "un art parfait" ("L'Art mnémonique").

[55] Chapter I of Winckelmann' s book is presumptuously entitled: "Grounds and Causes of the Progress and Superiority of Greek Art Beyond that of Other Nations." He argues that one of the main characteristics which provides Greek art supremacy is the Greek penchant for idealization of reality: "In conformity to this teaching of experience, those wise artists, the ancients, acted as a skillful gardener does, who engrafts different shoots of excellent sorts upon the same stock; and as a bee gathers from many flowers, so were their ideas of beauty not limited to the beautiful in a single individual (…) but they sought to unite the beautiful parts of many beautiful bodies" (50-51).

[56] Regarding the issue of anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century French society and its culmination in the Dreyfus Affair, see Hannah Arendt, *The Jew As Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (1978) and E. Gould, *Dreyfus and the Literature of the Third Republic* (2012).

equated Japanese artists with exquisite taste, while Jewish artists were considered to have vulgar, mercantile taste (*Journal* June 6, 1874; February 20, 1875).[57]

After 1854, when Japan was forced to open itself up to the West and after the 1867 *Universal Exhibition* that took place in Paris, the practice of collecting Japanese artworks was the preoccupation of the artistic elite. At that time *Japonisme* was the mark of refined taste and high social standing. However, by the end of the century, the bourgeoisie expressed its interest and when *Japonisme*, according to Max Put, turned into a "veritable craze… invad[ing] the homes of the middle-class," the self-proclaimed artistic elites became interested in the art of the eighteenth century (*Plunder and Pleasure* 12). In this context, Edmond felt the need to restate his and his brother's status as precursors of this trend. They frequented the art dealers Philippe Sichel (1840-99) and Siegfried Bing (1838-1905) who had introduced Japanese prints, small pieces of furniture, and decorative objects to art enthusiasts (Put 12). Edmond's monograph of Hokusai, published in 1896, could also be read as the writer's farewell to *Japonisme* as beloved eccentricity that had become monopolized by popular culture.

Germinie Lacerteux (1865) is a compelling illustration of Edmond's and Jules's early preoccupation with *Japonisme*, before it became a bourgeois fashion. In certain descriptions from the novel, the Parisian landscape is transfigured by the eyes of these aesthetes and resembles Japanese prints. In Chapter XXX, Germinie and Jupillon walk through a deserted Parisian street in March, providing the opportunity for a description of nature, seen through a Japanese lens: "Ils arrivèrent à une route pavée qui se reculait et s'allongeait éternellement entre deux lignes de réverbères, entre deux rangées d'arbres

[57] For a discussion of the Goncourts' idea of inferior art see Dominique Péty, *Les Goncourt et la collection*, especially pp. 87-93.

tortillés jetant au ciel une poignée de branches sèches et plaquant à de grands murs plats leur ombre immobile et maigre" (87). This conceptualization of nature, proposing an alignment of the main elements of the painting in a space that lacks depth and which is close to the picture frame, resembles Hokusai's depiction of plum branches from his 1820-1830 period. Through the use of significant, stylized details, or through what Carlo Calza calls a "style of enchanted beauty" (*Hokusai* 127), the Japanese artist captures the expressive power of nature. Hokusai's trees and branches acquire a hieratic, motionless, almost statuesque quality, textually reenacted by the immobility of the Goncourtian description.

This arboreal motif reappears in the last chapter, in which the Goncourts render a winter setting in a cemetery on the outskirts of Paris, overlooking Montmartre: "Dans son angle, à gauche, trois arbres dépouillés dressaient sur le ciel leurs sèches branches noires. Ils bruissaient tristement avec un son de bois mort entre-choqué par la bise. … De petits murs gris suivaient l'escarpement, surmontés de maigres arbres décharnés dont les bouquets se violaçaient dans la brume…" (164-5). The inflexibility of these austere trees, and their inability to change during the different seasons, epitomizes Germinie's constant suffering and her failure to improve her destiny. Likewise, in Hokusai's rendition of nature in the print "The Chinese poet Su Dongpo" (*A Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Verses*), the landscape reflects and completes the character's mindset, constituting "an analysis of the human soul" (Calza 230). Similarly, the textual depiction in *Germinie Lacerteux* of this sordid cemetery framed by barren trees, colored in a violet tint, is intended to speak for the dead heroine. The Goncourtian description and Hokusai's print both capture an atmospheric quality evocative of an inner vision. While

the print produces a feeling of serenity and stability, the textual combination of auditory ("rustled drearily; clashing") and visual ("a violet tinge") metaphors used in the novel causes the Goncourtian landscape to acquire an unsettling quality, and is meant to distress the reader, suggesting the plight of the main character.

Returning to Bloy and his aversion for the Goncourts' penchant for *Japonisme*, Pierre Glaudes notes in "Léon Bloy, lecteur des Goncourt" that the critic considers non-Western sources of inspiration as corruptive ("infâme") in view of his pronounced Catholic beliefs, bordering on fundamentalism.[58] This narrative anticipates Max Nordau's 1892 scientific treatise *Dégéneration*, as both Bloy and Nordau regard degeneration as a social disease, taking it upon themselves to catalogue the manifestations of this disorder in artists and their works, with a view towards curing the society of this epidemic. "Degenerates" affirms Nordau, "are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists" (*Degeneration* vii). In the fin-de-siècle context, degeneration becomes a concept related to the study of civilization, of the body, of the mind, and of art.[59]

Bloy's article "Les Premières plumes d'un vieux dindon," published in October 1884, sets forth a comparable discourse of normality and implicitly excludes that which transgresses orthodoxy, blaming the Goncourtian *écriture artiste* for the moral decay of French society. While, as I have noted earlier, it is very important to criticize the anti-

[58] Glaudes characterizes Bloy as a "traditionaliste catholique teinté de fumisme qui, au début des années 1880, condamne la littérature moderne sous son double aspect- l'ambition réaliste et l'*écriture artiste* – comme une tragique dégradation esthétique, morale et socio-culturelle" (104).

[59] In *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, Charles Bernheimer provides a comprehensive analysis of this complex and multifaceted notion (3).

Jewish propaganda latent in the Goncourts' elitist conceptualization of *écriture artiste* as a type of art for the happy few that the Jewish middle class is unable to produce and appreciate, Bloy had in mind his own nationalist propaganda. According to Bloy, the Goncourts are "infâmes manufacturiers de lettres qui ont *anémié* pendant trente ans l'esprit français, si robustement nourri avant eux par le grand Balzac, que le survivant de ces deux drôles a l'imprudence de mépriser" ("Les Premières plumes d'un vieux dindon" 78). By combining poetic discourse with medical jargon and colloquialisms, Bloy seeks to provide scientific and methodic justification for his arguments. Upon closer inspection, however, the writer's claim that *écriture artiste* has weakened ("*anémié*"*)* French national sentiment comes across as unconvincing. Bloy's mixture of formal and informal registers produces, in turn, an experimental and rather eccentric style, as convoluted as *écriture artiste* that it aims to discredit.

Bloy's criticism of Goncourtian aesthetics is important because it points out the politicized stakes of *écriture artiste*, which, in its time, was regarded as a tool of propaganda meant to legitimate a very particular type of artistic production that can only be created by the "plumes les plus entièrement vouées à l'art" (*Journal* December 27, 1860). Edmond's and Jules' complex and multifaceted style challenges the Academic hierarchy of genres by giving primacy to landscape over history painting, and by asserting the supremacy of the novel over poetry. It also challenges "uninspired traditionalism" and the "dogmatic counsel to abide by an artificial and forever invariable canon of beauty" by introducing, like Zola and Huysmans, contemporary subjects -- at times, even crude and disturbing subjects -- in their novels (Lee 12). Ultimately, *écriture artiste* constitutes a system of ideas and ideals that the Goncourts constantly fashion as an

alternative to institutional conventions in order to achieve a unique artistic ideology that would ensure their posterity and present their challenges to authority.

The Goncourt Academy

The Académie des Goncourt was conceived by Edmond both as a laboratory for the exploration and the promotion of the elusive essence of the novelistic genre, and as an alternative to the Académie française, which held poetry and history as the most meritorious literary productions. In 1883, while working on *Chérie,* he returns to discussing the impossibility of grasping the essence of literature and of the novelistic genre:

> Décidément le nom roman ne nomme plus les livres que nous faisons. Je voudrais un titre nouveau, que je cherche sans le trouver, où il y aurait peut-être à introduire le mot : HISTOIRES au pluriel, avec une épithète 'ad hoc', mais voilà le 'chiendent' : c'est l'épithète... Non il faudrait pour dénommer le nouveau roman, un vocable unique. (March 4, 1883)

Edmond ultimately acknowledges the impossibility of delivering an accurate ("ad hoc") definition of the literary category "novel," a definition that would provide an exact meaning of this noun, and that would account for all the productions that have received this title.

This crisis of categorization appears very early on in the Goncourtian opus and persists throughout their work. The truncated title of their first novel *En 18..*, is a symbol of its composite nature; the text amalgamates socio-historical details from the nineteenth

century with poetry, art criticism, the epistolary genre, the dramatic genre, memoir, and historical chronicle. If we add to this long catalogue the taste for scientific observation, apparent in their later works, we understand the need for this all-encompassing "vocable unique." The Goncourtian reluctance to offer a fixed categorization of the novel and literature in general brings to mind Jacques Derrida's statement on literature from "Demeure: Fiction and Testimony": "the name and the thing called 'literature', remain for me, to this day, endless enigmas, as much as they remain passions" (20). And it is this passion for "le nouveau roman, un vocable unique" that compels Edmond to suggest a way out of this crisis by incorporating the noun "histoires" into his definition of the novel. This implies both the interrelation between personal stories and their role within social/national history, and a subversion of the Academic hierarchy of genres that asserts the preeminence of history writing over the novel.

In his article "Du Grenier à l'Académie des Goncourt : la terreur douce," Jean-Louis Cabanès points out the anti-Academic reverberations of the Académie Goncourt : "La préférence donnée par le testament au roman signait la ruine, déjà réalisée dans les faits, mais non dans les institutions littéraires, de la hiérarchie des genres" (268). While Edmond's gesture of relegating all their material belongings to this institution was in part a tactic of self-promotion designed to maintain awareness of his and Jules's works (as many critics have remarked), posthumous glory, however, was not the sole purpose of their "Société littéraire" (*Testament* 3).[60] Another motivation was to create an alternative institution that would implement the Goncourt's idiosyncratic views on art.

[60] In the article "Du journal à l'Académie," Robert Kopp notes: "Retenons pour notre propos, à la fois une obsession de la survie, de la durée, omniprésente dans le *Journal*, et une obsession de la reconnaissance immédiate" (261).

Edmond's decision to found an unconventional literary Academy had strong politicized undertones, and came about as a continuation of the *Grenier*, the literary cenacle that he organized in his Auteuil house. After the peak of Naturalism (1870s-1880s) and the dissolution of Zola's Médan group, several literary schools materialized and coexisted in the last two decades of the century.[61] They were designated by the umbrella terms Decadence and Symbolism, the former being prominently used in connection with the novel and the latter referring to poetry and the visual arts.[62] Edmond's literary salon was attended by several younger artists, including J. K. Huysmans, Alphonse Daudet, Paul Bourget, Guy de Maupassant, Henri Céard, Robert Caze, Jules Vidal, Paul Alexis, Charpentier, and Gustave Geffroy (the latter later became the president of the Académie Goncourt), and it provided the basis for the literary institution which was first designated as the Académie des Goncourt (*Journal,* November 15, 1885).

In his testament, dated November 16, 1884, Edmond states his intention to endorse the novelistic genre by founding the Académie des Goncourt:

> Mon vœu suprême, vœu que je prie les Jeunes Académiciens futurs d'avoir présent à la mémoire, c'est que ce prix soit donné à la jeunesse, à l'originalité du talent, aux tentatives nouvelles et hardies de la pensée et de

[61] Zola theorizes his personal conceptualization of literature in his 1880 *Roman expérimental.* Compelled to maintain his and his brother's legacy, Edmond writes *Chérie* as a theoretical discourse centered around the *écriture artiste* (which had been previously designated in the preface to the *Frères Zemganno*) and inaugurates, on February 1, 1885, his own cenacle -- the *Grenier* -- meeting on Sundays in his Auteuil house.

[62] In *L'imaginaire décadent* (1880-1900), Jean Pierrot affirms: "La Décadence constitue le dénominateur commun de toutes les tendances littéraires qui se manifestent dans les vingt dernières années du siècle […] mouvement parallèle, dans le domaine de la création romanesque, à celui qui en poésie allait s'épanouir dans le Symbolisme" (16).

> la forme. Le roman dans des conditions d'égalité aura toujours la préférence sur les autres genres. (*Testament* 7)

The Academy and the literary prize entitled the *Prix Goncourt* are designed to level the ground and provide "conditions d'égalité" between the canonically reinforced hierarchy of the *high* and *low* literary genres. By privileging the innovative, groundbreaking work of the "Jeunes Académiciens," who would never get the recognition they deserve through official channels, Edmond clearly denounces the entrenched views of the French Academy and satirizes the *Immortels*. Edmond seizes this opportunity to openly suggest the doctrinal antagonism between his Academy and the Académie française, by specifying that it is impossible for a member of the Académie Goncourt to be a member of the official institution. Despite the similarities between the aesthetics of Delacroix and the Goncourts, this blatant rejection on Edmond's part seems to suggest that there will always be a gulf between them. Edmond's tribute to what he deems as original talents is designed as a posthumous continuation of his and his brother's compulsion to "faire du neuf": to revolutionize literature, to shock the public, and to promote "non-literature" by inscribing it within the literary domain (*Préfaces* vii).[63]

Acknowledging the aesthetic and ideological implications of a school surrounding Goncourtian literature, Léon Bloy criticizes this institution very virulently. In his 1891 article "L'Idole des Mouches," the critic condemns the linguistic experimentation as well

[63] In the forward to *Préfaces et manifestes littéraires,* written in September 1888, Edmond enumerates retrospectively some of his and his brother's literary innovations, amongst which are "introduire au théâtre une langue littéraire parlée" as well as "utiliser en histoire des matériaux historiques, restés sans emploi avant eux (les lettres autographes, les tableaux, les gravures, l'objet mobilier)" (vii).

as the moral corruption ensuing from what he sees as the artistic idolatry that the Académie Goncourt will be capable of fostering:

> Ce n'est pas d'hier qu'on abuse de la parole ou de l'Écriture pour l'extermination de la pensée… Mais cela se passait dans les solitudes et dans les ténèbres… Maintenant c'est une École et même une Académie. *L'Académie des Goncourt!* Satan tient enfin ce qu'il a mendié dix-neuf siècles : une sortable contrefaçon du Verbe incarné que pût adorer en conscience et propager de gaîté de cœur l'adolescente oligarchie de nos mandarins ! ("L'Idole des Mouches" 102)

Aside from these disconcerting apocalyptic remarks regarding the "extermination de la pensée" and the "sortable contrefaçon du Verbe incarné," the real issue here revolves around the question of literary legitimacy and public recognition. Bloy is concerned that the "adolescente oligarchie" – namely, the ten artists named as members of this literary society, as well as artists from their circle and the recipients of the literary prize -- could monopolize the literary scene and legitimize a narrative style that would transform public taste. As a writer rejected from the fashionable circles that Goncourt moved in, Bloy is apprehensive about his own literary standing in this type of scenario. The critic is frustrated with the difficulty to access this alternative institution, which is just as exclusive as the French Academy. Bloy's financial security was threatened as well by this "oligarchy" since, as a critic his job was dependent on catering to the taste of the public, and that public was changing. History has shown that the Goncourts, despite their numerous flaws, were not entirely devoid of artistic foresight, since the list of possible members provided in their *Testament* contains resonant names such as Théophile Gautier,

Gustave Flaubert, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Émile Zola (who was removed after he applied to become an *Immortel*), Guy de Maupassant, and Joris-Karl Huysmans (4).[64]

Although Edmond's ambition to shelter the "jeunes académiciens" from financial constraints that could jeopardize their artistic career failed due to faulty management of the funds entrusted to the Academy, the *Prix Goncourt* was considered in its time a very prestigious award. In 1919, a young Marcel Proust was its recipient for his groundbreaking novel *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs.* This was a symbolic moment since this young Jewish writer proved his worthiness as one of the "plumes les plus entièrement vouées à l'art" theorized and exemplified in "écriture artiste" (*Journal*, 27 December, 1860).

Awarded to "une œuvre d'imagination" written "exclusivement en prose," the *Prix Goncourt* is currently one of the most coveted literary prizes in France (*Testament* 6). Despite the negligible financial award of a couple of Euros, the *Prix Goncourt* provides significant symbolic capital, according to Bourdieu's definition from his seminal work *Distinction*. Receiving *Le Goncourt,* as it is now referred to, represents a judgment of taste, which assures instant recognition of the writer in the literary world. This, in turn, guarantees the approval of both the literary elite and of the general public. *Le Goncourt* is very trendy. As a matter of fact, French and Francophone readers take pride in keeping up with the *Goncourt* of the year and assessing its value or lack thereof.

[64] In a footnote to his *Testament* from November 16, 1884, Edmond draws attention to the fact that Maupassant can no longer be considered a member of the Académie des Goncourt due to his mental illness. However, Edmond glosses over the aesthetic differences of opinion between the two authors, aggravated after the publication of *Pierre et Jean.* In that novel's preface, Maupassant openly criticizes *écriture artiste*, and Edmond perceives it as a personal affront: "Dans la préface de son nouveau roman, Maupassant, attaquant *l'écriture artiste*, m'a visé, sans me nommer" (*J* 15: 66).

Ultimately, reading this type of work of fiction confers upon the reader an aura of distinction. In his article "Un Goncourt, ça gagne (com)bien?" (2011) published in *Slate.fr,* Jean-Marc Proust emphasizes the "force de persuasion" of the *Prix Goncourt*, and points out that the 2011 recipient of the award, *L'art français de la guerre,* made 2.8 million euros in 10 weeks after being conferred with this distinction.

This "force de persuasion" connects to my initial claim that the Goncourt brothers' and Delacroix's art theories directed against the French Academic Institution, as a body that imposed its authority of the arts, had a strong symbolic character. As Bourdieu demonstrates in *Distinction*, by changing aesthetic conventions these artists influenced public taste and sought to gain cultural capital. In Chapter III, I will analyze the strategies that Gustave Flaubert and Gustave Moreau utilize in *Salammbô* and *The Salome* series so as to persuade their public that their productions need to be understood as works of imagination whose value can only be established outside of mimetic constraints.

CHAPTER III

MODES OF RECEPTION IN GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S *SALAMMBÔ* AND GUSTAVE MOREAU'S *SALOME* CYCLE

> La Forme est peut-être une erreur de tes sens, la Substance une imagination de ta pensée. À moins que le monde étant un flux perpétuel des choses, l'apparence au contraire ne soit tout ce qu'il y a de vrai, l'illusion la seule réalité. (Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes* I 565)[1]

In the article "Le Salon Officiel de 1880," J.-K. Huysmans establishes a connection between the works of the Goncourt brothers, Gustave Flaubert, and Gustave Moreau, based on shared aesthetic traits:

> Et encore le style de M. Moreau se rapprocherait-il plutôt de la langue orfévrie des de Goncourt. S'il était possible de s'imaginer l'admirable et définitive *Tentation* de Gustave Flaubert, écrite par les auteurs de *Manette Salomon*, peut-être aurait-on l'exacte similitude de l'art si délicieusement raffinée de M. Moreau. La Salomé […] vivait d'une vie surhumaine, étrange… (*L'Art moderne* 153-154)

Indeed, Huysmans is not the only one to have noted some similarities between the Goncourts' predilection for elaborate figures of speech and use of a convoluted syntax,

[1] Hereinafter Flaubert's *Œuvres complètes* will be parenthetically referred to as *OC*.

and Flaubert's preoccupation with finding the 'mot juste.'[2] Flaubert's correspondence surrounding the writing process and the publication of *Salammbô* (1857-1863) and the Goncourt *Journal* all show that these three writers often engaged in philosophical discussions related to their literary projects: the 'bichon's' social history and Flaubert's Carthaginian novel.

In general, criticism on Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers has tended to concentrate on the formal qualities of their writing, partly overlooking the way in which these stylistic traits reflect their interest in the reception of their literary productions. There are, nevertheless, some exceptions to this analytic trend that have informed my analysis. Raymonde Debray-Genette argues that Flaubert and the Goncourts do not recreate a mimetic, realistic image of 'reality' in their novels, but rather, provide readers with an imaginative translation of the natural world.[3] In *Le Tournant 'artiste' de la littérature française,* Bernard Vouilloux examines the predilection of Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers for a "littérature de myope," by which he understands a type of textual production that is suffused with details. Vouilloux's analysis is based on a *Journal* entry in which the Goncourts make a distinction between "la litérature ancienne" and modern literature: "Le caractère de la littérature ancienne est d'être une littérature de presbyte, c'est-à-dire d'ensemble. Le caractère de la littérature moderne- et son progrès- est d'être une littérature de myope, c'est-à-dire de détails" (June 5, 1863). According to Vouilloux,

[2] I discuss the idiosyncrasies of the Goncourtian style in Chapter II. See also Albalat, *Comment il ne faut pas écrire*, especially Chapter I, "Les Goncourt, Péguy et Loti- 'dislocateurs du style,'" 1-6, and Vouilloux, *L'Art des Goncourt: Une esthetique du style,* especially Chapter II, "Mimèsis et sémiosis," 61-92.

[3] See Debray-Genette's articles "La Figuration descriptive: Flaubert, les Goncourt" (51) and "Traversée de l'espace descriptif" (329-344).

the Goncourts and Flaubert produce this type of overly detailed writing in order to affirm the autonomous nature of the work of art, which is meant to exist independently of its readers (Vouilloux 374). Jacques Rancière also provides a compelling examination of Flaubert's and the Goncourt's politics of reading. In his talk *La Politique de la fiction*, Rancière argues that these writers disrupt the traditional social and stylistic hierarchies that dominate 'realist' fiction in the nineteenth century (February 9, 2012). Rancière contends that Flaubert and the Goncourts create a "democratic" fictional world in which all characters, regardless of their social status, have access to some "formes d'expérience qui leurs étaient jusque-là refusées" (*La Politique de la fiction,* February 9, 2012). He also remarks that animate beings and inanimate objects are treated with a similar attention in the fictional universe, receiving the same airtime, if you will.

Expanding on these theories, I contend in the current chapter that Flaubert's novel *Salammbô* (1862) attests to the writer's desire to fashion the views of the public, by advocating for the artist's freedom to reshape historical, documentary sources according to the laws of fiction. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the Goncourts use formal and thematic innovations encompassed in *écriture artiste*, in order to propose an alternative set of rules that contravene Academic regulations. In *Salammbô*, Flaubert's interest in the autonomization of the artwork from the constraints of verisimilitude, which is similar to the Goncourts' treatment of documentary sources in *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV* (1860), needs to be understood as a politics of fiction. By this I mean that, Flaubert's regard for local color, a prerequisite for the historical novel, is undermined the overuse of apparently superfluous details, similar to the writing strategies of the Goncourts in their *Maîtresses*, is meant to signal to the readers that they are reading a work of fiction.

Flaubert in particular is interested not only in how his work is received by the public, but in creating a new kind of reading practice that calls for an interpretation of the work of art as a fictional construct of an imaginative creator, rather than as a mimetic reflection of historical fact. I contend that for Flaubert, as well as for Gustave Moreau in his *Salome* paintings from the 1870s, this type of interpretative practice on the part of the readers and spectators is encouraged by drawing attention to the textual and painted surface level of the work. The writer uses extensive, elaborative cataloguing and lyrical embellishments, and the painter employs decorative motifs that appear to the viewer to have been added after the three-dimensional painting was finished. For the purpose of this study, by textual surface level I understand the level of details and description, rather than plot levels or depths of character interiority. These 'deeper' textual levels can be obscured when the 'surface' level is thus emphasized. By surface level of a painting I mean the adornments that question the illusion of perspective and the three-dimensionality of the composition, and which point to the fact that the viewer is admiring art.

Another remark that I need to make is that, as Roland Barthes contends in "L'effet du reel," in nineteenth-century realist tradition the existence of details amounts to a "reality effect" (484). Discussing Flaubert's barometer in the short story "Un cœur simple," Barthes notes that its existence is not gratuitous. Rather, "il se produit un *effet de réel*, fondement de ce vraisemblable inavoué qui forme l'esthétique de toutes les œuvres courantes de la modernité" (484). However, Rancière argues in his address *La Politique de la fiction* that in "Un cœur simple," and I extend this discussion to *Salammbô*, the profusion of elaborate details has the opposite effect, being designed to call attention to the lack of reality of the work. Rancière maintains that "le réel prouve sa réalité par le fait

qu'il est là sans raison" (*La Politique de la fiction,* February 9, 2012). Therefore, if the real is too elaborate, then it becomes an artificial construct that is designed to serve a fictional purpose. In the context of Flaubert's politics of reception, I therefore maintain that this strategy is meant to affirm the autonomous nature of the work of art from the constraints of external reality in order to transmit an artistic legacy.[4] I propose that Flaubert was audacious enough to demonstrate in *Salammbô* that, within a work of fiction, reality is merely a pretext, as he confirms in a letter to his protégé Guy de Maupassant: "La Réalité, selon moi, ne doit être qu'un *tremplin.* Nos amis [les Réalistes et les Naturalistes] sont persuadés qu'à elle seule elle constitue tout l'État ! " (December 25, 1876). Flaubert constructs this springboard in *Salammbô* by means of what the critic Alcide Dusolier calls reproaching a "style machiné aux jointures visibles" (Dusolier CHH 2: 409). Flaubert suggest, through the poetics and themes of *Salammbô* that only those readers willing to embrace this concept of verisimilitude within the fictional universe will be freed from the "habitudes littéraires de l'époque" (Gautier CHH 2: 454).

This freedom from hackneyed reading habits is a key concept in my analysis because it has a double purpose. It allows readers to acknowledge the originality of Flaubert's endeavor in *Salammbô* and it educates the public on what can be regarded as good quality writing. Flaubert's interest in contemporary reading practices is also expressed in his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. This work could be considered a pedagogical instrument (*castigat ridendo mores*), a way of showing his contemporaries the stereotypical nature of the ideas that they take for granted. Moreover, returning to Huysmans' notion of "langue orfévrie," this metaphor references the materiality of the

[4] In Chapter II, I examine the role of the Goncourt Academy as both defender and propagator of the brothers' artistic legacy.

Goncourtian style, while pointing out that the manufactured aspect of a work of art is an artistic concern, one that connects the works of Flaubert and Gustave Moreau. In turn, Huysmans himself will experiment with the this "langue orfévrie" in *A rebours*, where he fills the text with figures of speech and an altered syntax in order to render the meandering musings of his neurotic protagonist.

In "Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface" Reinhold Heller defines the technique of "surface construction" in relation to the works of the Symbolist artists Gauguin, Degas, Munch and Khnopff from the 1880s and 1890s (151). This is not to say that Gustave Moreau's *Salome* paintings from the 1870s were as experimental in terms of iconography and subject matter as the productions of the aforementioned Symbolist painters. Nevertheless, I want to argue that Moreau's *Salome* cycle shows signs of what Heller calls "an emphatic assertion of the independent, material and manufactured existence of art works" and of " their presence as objects separate from the objects of nature" (151). Building on Heller's theory, I apply this aesthetic practice of "deny[ing] the presentation of art as an extension of visible nature" to both Flaubert's *Salammbô* and Moreau's *Salome* canvases. I suggest that this interest in the material components of the artwork becomes a manifestation of a politics of reading, apparent in the Goncourtian notion of *écriture artiste,* understood as a methodology on art and an attempt to promote a brand of 'pure' art. This type of art, by "accentuat[ing] the pictorial surface and the autonomous existence of the work of art," as Heller puts it, is designed to subvert the paramount role of resemblance and verisimilitude in the process of artistic appreciation, while forming readers who can instead appreciate art according to paradigms established by the art world (Heller 148).

As particularly compelling examples of this kind of art, I will examine a set of descriptions from Gustave Flaubert's pseudo-historical novel *Salammbô* (1862), paralleled with Gustave Moreau's paintings from the *Salome* cycle, particularly *Salome Tattooed* (oil on canvas, 1874), *The Apparition* (watercolor 1874-76), *The Apparition* (oil on canvas 1874-76), and *Salome Dancing before Herod* (1874-76 oil on canvas). By starting from the premise that these artists put forth in these works what the Goncourts call "[un] monde imaginaire et vraisemblable," I investigate the techniques they utilized to achieve this manufactured aspect of the literary and painted surface (Goncourt, *Correspondance 1: 494)*. This was designed to signal to the public what Heller terms the "symbolic function" of the artwork as the " subjective expression of ideas" (151).

Framework, Theories, and Flaubert's Response to Contemporary Reception

Gustave Moreau was one of the few contemporary artists that Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers admired and whose opus they referred to in laudatory terms. In his own writings on art, however, Gustave Moreau does not refer to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, and he criticizes Flaubert, whom he characterizes as the example of the unimaginative member of the bourgeoisie. In *L'Assembleur de rêves,* Moreau's writings on art, the painter affirms disdainfully: "L'important pour ne pas être un prud'homme, un bourgeois dans le sens intellectuel que lui donnaient tant de gens prétendus artistes, c'est de n'en avoir ni l'âme ni le cerveau. Qui plus prud'homme que ce pauvre Flaubert ?" (210). In spite of Moreau's unkind remark about "ce pauvre Flaubert," the "pretend[u] artiste," Adrienne Tooke has argued in her seminal work *Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts*

that the painter and the writer had similar views on the role of art in nineteenth-century society. According to Tooke, "Flaubert found echoes of his own position and his own aesthetic in Moreau." She argues that like Flaubert, Moreau "stood alone in his century," and that Moreau's works consider the "act of looking," which was very important for Flaubert as well (46). Took also remarks on Moreau's combination of text and image in the *Salome* paintings of 1867 in terms of their "strange writing-like patterns" (46). However she interprets this technique as a way in which both artists "trac[e] the limits of their art" (46). Commentators have also noted the existence of interplay between Flaubert's and Moreau's oriental-inspired women. Tooke, Françoise Meltzer and Martine Alcobia, for instance, have argued that Flaubert's *Salammbô* inspired Moreau to paint his *Salome*. In turn, Moreau's canvases *Salome Dancing before Herod* and the watercolor *The Apparition,* exhibited at the Salon of 1876, inspired Flaubert in his literary portrayal of Salome in *Hérodias* (1877).[5] Meltzer argues that Flaubert's Punic priestess Salammbô and Moreau's Salome are incarnations of the femme fatale as both "virgin" and "devouress" (18). Moreover, Peter Cooke contends in "Gustave Moreau's Salome" that the painter wished to revolutionize history painting by subverting "archeological exactitude" with "extreme eclecticism" and by "refus[ing] the vocabulary and rhetoric of academic art" (536). Similarly, Anne Green's *Flaubert and the Historical Novel* provides a rigorous discussion of Flaubert's innovations in relation to the tradition of the history novel. She maintains that with *Salammbô* Flaubert renewed the genre of the historical novel by combining historical accuracy with imaginative poetics.[6]

[5] See Meltzer 18, Tooke 46, and Alcobia 41-64.

[6] For a rigorous analysis of Flaubert's innovations in relation to the tradition of the historical novel, see Green 4-16.

As Flaubert's own letters show, the most poignant examples of which are addressed to correspondents such as Louise Colet, Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, and Maupassant, the writer cast himself in the role of a mentor, teaching his disciples how to understand, how to read (and what to read), and how to produce literature and art in general.[7] If Flaubert proved reluctant to conform to "le bon lecteur 'Françoys'" (to Ernest Feydeau, December 1857) by which he referenced the type of reader who embraces without questioning the *idées reçues* of the time, I would argue that he was equally reluctant to banish what Vouilloux calls "tout ce qui, supposant un auteur- au registre des idées, des mots dits 'd'auteur'- appellerait un lecteur et instaurerait entre eux une relation quelconque" (*Le Tournant 'artiste' de la littérature française* 374).[8] I suggest that Flaubert's artistic undertaking in *Salammbô* is directed at his particular brand of readership, one that does not expect the straightforwardness of a *roman à clé*, readership that the writer was striving to mold according to his original artistic ideology. In this sense, the writer believed that, as Rancière contends, "il n'y a pas d'art sans regard qui le voie comme art" (*Le Destin des images* 84). Therefore, Flaubert takes it upon himself to shape the reading practices of his contemporaries in the *Dictionnaire*, in his Correspondence and in his works of fiction, especially *Salmmbô,* his pseudo-historical novel.

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[7] See Poyet's Chapter II, "Naissance à l'écriture et à la littérature," 33-51, ch. 6, "Flaubert et les relations confraternelles," 115-140, and ch. 7, "Flaubert et ses enfants spirituels," 141-165.

[8] For Flaubert's correspondence I have used the electronic version provided by Danielle Girard et Yvan Leclerc on the *Centre Flaubert* website, http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/correspondance/conard/outils/annuels.html (June 2015).

His ideological program is apparent in his reaction to the criticism of Sainte-Beuve and of the archeologist Guillaume Frœhner. While Flaubert generally tended to refrain from responding to the critics of his time, he wrote back to Sainte-Beuve and to Frœhner regarding their negative reviews of *Salammbô,* his novel about the rebellion of mercenaries against Carthage, set in the third century BCE. The writer actually engaged in a public debate with Frœhner, to whom he addressed two articles: one addressed directly to the scientist, and published in both *L'Opinion nationale* (January 24, 1863) and *La Revue contemporaine* (January 31, 1863), and a second one addressed to the director of the *L'Opinion nationale* (February 2, 1863), as a response to a subsequent article by Frœhner (*CHH* 2: 371-402).[9] To cite Frœhner's attacks against *Salammbô* as an illustration, on the one hand, of the archeologist's obtuseness and, on the other, of Flaubert's skill in subverting the literary canon of his time, has become a *lieu commun* of criticism on this pseudo-historical novel. In my own analysis, I take Frœhner's response to the novel not as an oddity, but as the reaction of an educated consumer of literature, whose views represent the norm in the 1860s. If we are to trust Flaubert's own statement: "il m'avait semblé le plus sérieux," Frœhner seems to exhibit the qualities of a reader who is worth initiating into the mysteries of the Flaubertian style (*CHH* 2: 402).

However, as both reader and scientist, Frœhner proved to be a disappointing interlocutor. In his articles, he indicates that he expected to find in *Salammbô* an instructive and easily-readable "roman historique." Yet, fatigued by the style and subject matter ("poursuivant péniblement ma lecture"), the archeologist is ultimately appalled to discover that, after he has invested much time and effort, this reading offers him little

[9] The *Club de L'Honnête Homme* edition of Flaubert's works will be hereinafter referred to as *CHH*.

erudite consolation, because the "archéologie est erronnée" (*CHH* 2: 383, 386). *Salammbô* unsettles notions about what a historical novel is obliged to provide, which challenges Frœhner's reading of the Carthaginian inspired fiction, and produces his vivid discontent. That is because Frœhner cannot detach himself from his expertise in the field of history and archeology and he cannot bring himself to read the account of the mercenary rebellion from the third century BCE as a fictional account stemming from a historical occurrence. In his critiques, Frœhner opts for the detached tone of expert discourse, deploring the confused state of the "lecteur," a member of the general public who is unable to grasp "les mots de toutes les langues." Therefore, Frœhner disdainfully concludes that the only plausible explanation is that "l'auteur ne savait pas non plus toujours ce qu'il écrivait" (*CHH* 2: 383). This argument supports his accusation that Flaubert is an impostor, a charlatan, leading his readers astray from historical accuracy: "M. Flaubert ne sera jamais savant que pour ceux qui ne le sont pas" (*CHH* 2: 400).

Flaubert, who was expecting this type of reaction from several groups within the general public, was actually looking forward to this type of direct confrontation with his detractors: "*Salammbô* 1° embêtera les bourgeois, c'est-à-dire tout le monde; 2° révoltera les nerfs et le coeur des personnes sensibles; 3° irritera les archéologues ; 4° semblera inintelligible aux dames ; 5° me fera passer pour pédéraste et anthropophage. Espérons-le!" (to Feydeau, October 1861). Deploying his trademark delightful irony, Flaubert responds to the archeologist that: "Je suis prêt… à reconnaître qu'il a raison et que l'antiquité est sa propriété particulière" (*CHH* 2: 401). In denying himself, as a writer of fiction, authority over a type of knowledge stemming from what he calls an enthusiastic, even messianic European science, mainly interested in "putting grand, bookish ideas

quixotically to work immediately," Flaubert invites Frœhner to reevaluate the dogmatisms and clichés of this type of reductive, "academic Orientalism" which, according to Said, was bourgeoning throughout the nineteenth-century academicism and which will become the main object of ridicule in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (*Orientalism,* 116, 180).

Flaubert's rapport with his readership is very different from the dedication and socialist-idealist aspirations of creating social improvement exhibited by Victor Hugo, Eugène Sue, George Sand, or Émile Zola.[10] The author of *Salammbô* probably never envisaged devoting his "pauvre petit joujou" to the instruction and improvement of French workers' living conditions, as did the exiled Hugo in *Les Misérables*, published around the same time (1862) (*Correspondence* November 30, 1861). Jeanne Bem interpreted the violent uprising of the mercenary army in *Salammbô* in terms of the Marxist theory of class conflict, since this was caused by the materialistic behavior of the wealthy Carthaginian merchants who refused to pay their 'employees.' Nevertheless, Bem is careful to point out that Flaubert did not intend to be a precursor of Georges Sorel and the unionization movement in France.[11] In fact, in letter to Louise Colet, Flaubert dismisses "trois quarts et demi du genre humain" as "natures médiocres," incapable of understanding "ce qu'il y a de meilleur dans l'Art" (May 17, 1853).

Therefore, the writer sees no point in lowering his aesthetic standards in order to cater to the masses since "on ne vulgarise pas le Beau; on le dégrade, voilà tout" (to

[10] In "Modernité de *Salammbô*" Bem affirms that "Le texte flaubertien ne sera jamais le manifeste du prolétaire!" (21-22). See also her analysis on the "roman du Capital," 22-25.

[11] See Bem 21-25. Regarding the birth of unions in France and the terror tactics used by proletarians in the class struggle, see Georges Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence*.

Louise Colet, May 17, 1853). While engaged in the process of writing *Salammbô,* Flaubert almost boasts to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie that his undertaking is "insensé" and therefore "n'aura aucun succès dans le public" (July 11, 1858). He then goes on to proclaim that one must write "pour soi, avant tout. C'est la seule chance de faire beau" (July 11, 1858). Continuing in this elitist vein, Flaubert writes to Jules Duplan a jubilatory letter, in which he notes that following the publication of *Salammbô*, two churches have accused him of plotting to revive paganism. These reactions both flatter and arouse the writer ("*Ça me flatte*, et ça m'excite!) as they provide a measure of his success over the hackneyed preconceptions of the public (March-April 1863).

Nevertheless, Flaubert switches to a more didactic tone and writes to the same Mademoiselle de Chantepie that "si je fais rêver quelques nobles imaginations, je n'aurai pas perdu mon temps," a statement which implies that writing solely for one's own pleasure may be a waste of time (February 18, 1859). While Flaubert refuses to accommodate traditional reader expectations and to direct his message to the general public, he nevertheless wants to inspire those worthy enough to perceive his work in the way he intends it to be read. To Madame Gustave de Maupassant, the writer announces proudly that "ma carthaginoise fait son chemin dans le monde" and that despite his initial plan to write for the happy few ("j'avais fait un livre pour un nombre très restreint de lecteurs"), it seems that "le public y mord" (January 1863). To which he adds one of his typical ambiguous sentences, in the form of the final lines of *Salammbô*: "Que le Dieu de la librairie soit béni!" (January 1863). One is not entirely sure if the so-called "hermit of Croisset" is disappointed or satisfied by the numerous readers who have read his novel and offered opinions about it. What does become very clear from his correspondence to

the Goncourt brothers and to his publisher Lévy is that he has an intimate understanding of the contemporary publishing industry.[12]

In fact, as Timothy Unwin has shown in "Gustave Flaubert and the Hermit of Croisset" Flaubert is by no means disconnected from the world, oblivious to his socio-political and ideological context (1-13). He admonishes his friend George Sand, because she treats him like an aesthete who has no knowledge of the world he lives in: "Ah! Vous croyez, parce que je passe ma vie à tâcher de faire des phrases harmonieuses, en évitant les assonances, que je n'ai pas, moi aussi, mes petits jugements sur les choses de ce monde ? Hélas oui ! Et même je crèverai enragé de ne pas les dire" (September 29, 1866). And these "petits jugements sur les choses de ce monde" come into play when Flaubert asks Jules de Goncourt's advice regarding the possible inconveniences that might arise from publishing his Carthaginian novel at the same time as Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The writer finally decides to delay the publication, since it would be both "impudent et imprudent de risquer *Salammbô* pendant ce temps-là" (November 30, 1861). In spite of the great difference in both subject and style between these two fictional accounts, Flaubert still worries that "[m]a pauvre chaloupe, mon pauvre petit joujou, sera écrasée par cette trirème, par cette pyramide" (November 30, 1861). It becomes clear from this exchange that for Flaubert writing "pour soi-même" is not the only consideration, since the artist wants his "petit joujou" to receive the public's undivided attention and to be acknowledged as an original literary endeavor. Frœhner intuits the concerns of this writer who had previously published only one masterpiece (*Madame Bovary,* 1857) and whose second novel might be overshadowed by the work of

[12] See, among others, his letters to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, November 30, 1861, and to Ernest Duplan, June 12, 1862, written around the time of the publication of *Salammbô*.

one of the most popular and charismatic writers of the nineteenth century, Victor Hugo. The archeologist, who seems to dislike equally both *Salammbô* and *Les Misérables,* cleverly manages to cast aspersions on Flaubert's aesthetics by accusing him of copying the style of Hugo in "ces phrases sublimes… ces idées colossales qui sont la marque distinctive du talent de Victor Hugo," an unjust insult for someone who dedicates so much time to cultivating a personal style (*CHH* 2:373).[13]

Conversely, in an article published on December 31, 1862 in the *Revue française*, the critic Alcide Dusolier expresses his irritation towards the utter difference between *Salammbô* and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the latter of which he believes to contain "de ces mots dominateurs qui commandent une page entière" (*CHH* 2: 409). As follower or opponent to Hugo's poetics, Flaubert's novel falls short. This is because, as the writer predicted, the majority of his public read this original work as a *roman à cléf* and are consequently very frustrated: "On m'a appelé 'ilote ivre,, on a dit que je répandais 'un air empesté,' on m'a comparé à Chateaubriand et à Marmontel, on m'accuse de viser à l'institut, et une dame qui avait lu mon livre a demandé à un de mes amis si Tanit n'était pas un diable" (letter to Madame Gustave de Maupassant, January 1863).[14] The reason why the general readership feels compelled to voice an opinion on what Sainte-Beuve calls "ce livre si attendu" after the publication of the resounding *Madame Bovary*, is

[13] "Pour nous," notes Frœner, "il nous semble que *Salammbô* est la fille naturelle des *Misérables* et du musée Campana… En revanche, la même diction forcée, le même penchant pour les atrocités, pour les scènes horribles, et une tendance fâcheuse à les rendre plus horribles encore. On éprouve à sa lecture la même impression farouche qu'on ressent en lisant *Les Misérables*" (*CHH* 2: 373).

[14] The appeal of the *roman à clef* still lingers, even among contemporary critics. In *Flaubert's Salammbô: The Ancient Orient as a Political Allegory of the Nineteenth-Century France*, Dürr interprets "the last stage of Carthaginian civilization with its greatest expansion under the Barcas" as a metaphorical rendition of the "fate of France under the Bonapartes…" (X).

because that would provide a fashionable topic of conversation in literary circles and social gatherings, not because the general public would necessarily enjoy the richness of *Salammbô*'s meaning and its technical artistry (*CHH* 2: 410). Yet, when Flaubert's second 'realist' and 'historical' novel comes out, the critics and the public have a very hard time to categorize it.

In order to come up with a valid categorization for *Salammbô*, Sainte-Beuve enumerates the reasons why this novel is not a "roman historique" (*CHH* 2: 435) and why the minutely detailed descriptions "exprime[ent] et accuse[ent] le procédé d'exécution" (*CHH* 2: 436). Dusolier rhetorically asks what *Salammbô* is, and answers his own question with an oxymoron which could also be applied to certain scenes of the Goncourts' work, notably *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV*: "une chose qu'on n'avait jamais vue: De l'imagination scientifique" (*CHH* 2: 405). This entails, according to the same commentator, a combination of "la rage du raffinement" with "la rage de la description" (*CHH* 2: 405). Thus, the widespread assumption surrounding the publication of *Salammbô*, to quote Frœhner once more, is that "les romanciers" are increasingly challenged by the "ressources restreintes ou épuisées" (*CHH* 2: 373) of their field.

There is at least one reader, however, who responds to Flaubert's literary appeal for a new way of appreciating fiction -- his fellow writer George Sand. It is thanks to the publication of *Salammbô* that Flaubert establishes a lifelong friendship with this model reader (*Correspondance,* January 1863). Of course, this does not mean that Flaubert was unaware of the "profound differences in aesthetics and politics" between himself and Sand.[15] Before I examine Sand's evaluation of *Salammbô* I need to point out that she

[15] See Rosemary Lloyd, "Flaubert's Correspondence," *Cambridge Companion to Flaubert,* 70.

utilizes the adjective "scientific" to refer to historical accuracy. By this she designates the use of factual, documentary evidence. In her laudatory piece published in *La Presse* on January 27, 1863, Sand defends the novelty of *Salammbô,* supporting its creator against any accusations of copying the works of other writers or of providing a faulty historical account based on inaccurate information: "Quant à la couleur locale," notes Sand, "il est d'usage de la recomposer à l'aide de la science, et permis de la compléter par les forces de la logique d'induction." Then Sand goes on to make the very important point that Flaubert's novel is first and foremost an original and innovative work of art that needs to be appreciated as such: "D'ailleurs, cette vérification n'a rien à faire avec la question d'art. Est-ce de la belle et bonne peinture ? Voilà ce dont il s'agit et ce que tout le monde est appelé à juger."[16] Sand models the accurate reading practice required by Flaubert's innovative novel. She thus defends "la beauté de la couleur et du dessin" of this artistic production, without feeling the need to determine the historical accuracy and validity of the information provided in the work of fiction. Moreover Sand remarks that Flaubert's novel not only mixes the mediums of writing and painting, but also proclaims the freedom of the writer (and the artist in general) to amplify historical facts according to his or her creative whims. According to George Sand's article from *La Presse*, the uniqueness of *Salammbô* is determined by the fact that "Flaubert, regardant son sujet par l'œil de l'imagination, s'est ébloui pour avoir trop vu," and by the idea that he implicitly transmitted this outlook to the reader who, upon starting to read this work of fiction, has

[16] The digitalized version of this article can be found on the website of *Centre Flaubert*: http://flaubert.univrouen.fr/etudes/salammbo/sal_san.php

agreed to take a voyage into the realms of the author's imagination ("s'embraqu[er] dans le cerveau de l'auteur").[17]

In this sense, Francisque Sarcey's commentary on *Salammbô,* in spite of its pedantic and didactic nature, is telling because, like George Sand's interpretation of the text, it provides a reader-oriented approach (*Nouvelle Revue de Paris,* March 15, 1864). In order to establish how and why this Carthaginian novel "n'aura pour les curieux d'autre intérêt que de marquer un des moments de notre littérature et l'une des révolutions de notre goût," Sarcey is pushed to define and analyze his literary expectations. He affirms that "le plaisir que nous sentions à voir un portrait bien peint s'accroissait du plaisir que donne toujours une ressemblance parfaite" (*Nouvelle Revue de Paris* March 15, 1864). Sarcey then acknowledges that his mimetic fantasy is interrupted mostly because "M. Gustave Flaubert, amoureux de la réalité, a choisi un sujet où il était impossible de la peindre vraie," due to the lack of documentary sources on Carthage (March 15, 1864). Sarcey, who is unsure how to approach the novel, decides to provide a very rich and poetic account of his reaction to the Carthaginian narrative:

> On sortait de cette lecture avec une sorte de tournoiement dans le cerveau ; des milliers d'étincelles dansaient devant les yeux, comme il arrive à ceux qui, après avoir attaché longtemps leur regard sur une lumière trop crue, rentrent brusquement dans l'obscurité. Ce n'était pas de l'ennui qu'on sentait, mais une horrible fatigue ; il semblait qu'on échappât d'un cauchemar. (*Nouvelle Revue de Paris,* March 15, 1864)

[17] *Centre Flaubert*: http://flaubert.univrouen.fr/etudes/salammbo/sal_san.php

It is noteworthy that this aesthetic and critical judgment, like that of George Sand who, in the aforementioned article from *La Presse,* speaks about the "beauté de la couleur et du dessin," treats the novel as if it were a work of visual art. The "milliers d'étincelles [qui] dansaient devant les yeux" that Sarcey describes represent a subjective experience of vision, similar to that of an afterimage produced by a camera obscura. Jonathan Crary defines the afterimage as "the presence of a sensation," which is "cut from any necessary link with an external referent" ("Techniques of the Observer" 9). For Sarcey, the attempt to assign meaning to *Salammbô* triggers "une sorte de tournoiement dans le cerveau," which, in turn, blurs the clear-cut contours of people, things, and places. Sarcey hopes to use archeological documents in order to recreate the physiognomy of the characters and the features of the landscape. This approach nevertheless fails, because, like Gustave Moreau's eclectic *Salome* paintings, Flaubert retains a few documentary details, around which he embroiders according to the caprice of his imagination.

There is nothing simplistic or straightforward about either of the main characters Salammbô, Mâtho, Hamilcar, and Spendius, nor the space they inhabit, and this produces this "horrible fatigue." Like most of the optical devices used in the nineteenth century, including the Thaumatrope, Faraday wheel, Phenakistiscope, Kaleidoscope, and Stereoscope, Flaubert's text "made unequivocally clear the hallucinatory and fabricated nature of the image" and of realist, mimetic art itself (Crary 17). Due to the makeup of human vision, we see a little differently with each eye, which makes it impossible for artists to provide a "faithful representation" of a near, solid object (Crary 28).

Flaubert's intuition of the "absolute rupture between perception and its object" (Crary 17) can account for what Sainte-Beuve regards as one of the great flaws of the

novel: the lack of a well-constructed hierarchy between people and objects, a relationship that in the novel is instead rooted in a profusion of descriptive details that seems to obscure the referent, rather than create an explicit, three-dimensional image of the referent.[18] Yet, it is this very lack of hierarchy in Flaubert's fiction that Rancière defines as a literary democracy (*La Politique de la fiction*, February 9, 2012). In a letter to Maurice Schlesinger, Flaubert indicates that he writes "fort lentement" because "un livre est pour moi une manière spéciale de vivre." Flaubert makes the subtle argument that artistic life cannot be identical to 'real' everyday life, but rather, that it needs to be 'special' (December 18, 1859). He then expounds his theory of literature: "à propos d'un mot ou d'une idée, je fais des recherches, je me livre à des divagations, j'entre dans des rêveries infinies." These "divagations" and "rêveries infinies" on the theme of art and literature are also apparent in the Goncourtian reflection on the concept of *écriture artiste* and in Gustave Moreau's *Écrits sur l'art* (published posthumously).[19]

[18] See Sainte-Beuve's series of articles about *Salammbô*; see also Debray-Genette's "Traversée de l'espace descriptif" and Vouilloux's *Le Tournant 'artiste' de la littérature française,* Chapter III, "Flaubert en myope"- especially 363.

[19] In *Le Tournant 'artiste'* Vouilloux compares some aspects of Goncourtian aesthetics with similar preoccupations apparent in the Flaubertian style: "Comme Sainte-Beuve, les détracteurs de cette tendance picturalisante y voient l'un des effets de la recherche du 'pittoresque' et de la 'couleur locale', encore aggravée par les essais de 'transposition d'art' entrepris dans la mouvance formaliste de l'art pour l'art. Ce mouvement culmine dans les raffinements de ce qu'Edmond de Goncourt nommera en 1881 'écriture artiste' et s'inscrit dans un processus qui, en même temps qu'il consacre l'autonomisation de la littérature (par l'emphatisassions de la littérarité), favorise les 'correspondances' entre les arts- processus à double détente que l'on pourrait résumer ainsi : *comme* (en tant qu') art verbal, la littérature est un art *comme* (au même titre que) la peinture et la sculpture" (350). I argue that *écriture artiste* is not just a manifestation of the art for art's sake movement. As I show in Chapter II, this style of writing has strong ideological undertones that represent a reaction to the discourse on Academically sanctioned art in general, and to the debates surrounding painting and the visual arts in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Common Artistic Practices in *Salammbô* and *The Salome* Cycle

Having mapped Flaubert's complex position in regard to his public, in the remainder of this chapter, the focus will be on the stylistic and thematic similarities of *Salammbô* and Moreau's paintings from the *Salome* cycle, and how these artistic details and methods compel viewers and readers to engage with artistic productions outside of what Sand calls factual verification. Flaubert's *Salammbô* and Moreau's Salome series of paintings are creations that illustrate what Rancière defines as the "matérisme," the over-aestheticized quality of their textual and painterly surfaces. By this I mean that their exposed, manufactured quality requires the readers to recognize that art is not "an extension of visible nature" (Heller 151). Flaubert and Moreau support the idea that art, in spite of its feigned connection with historical fact, is ultimately a product of the poetic imagination that needs to be perceived as such by the public (*Le Destin des images* 93). Furthermore Foucault characterized Flaubert's *Tentation de saint Antoine* as a text exhibiting "des formes d'onirisme érudit" (Foucault 11), due to the writer's ability to combine "divagations" and "rêverier infinies" with rigorous and meticulous historical research (to Maurice Schlesinger, December 18, 1859).

The same can be said of *Salammbô*, where the numerous and varied sources consulted by Flaubert are integrated in such as a way within the fabric of his text that they could easily be either dismissed as fiction (as Frœhner suggests) or regarded as tiresome archeological information (as Sarcey argues). Flaubert mixes detailed documentary information with creative digressions, which muddle the readability of the intrigue. The reader, instead of concentrating on what will happen next, has to focus

instead on the meaning of the rare words and on recreating the background, the attire, the local color of Carthage. These details, therefore, end up showing the presence of a writer who deliberately orchestrates what Dusolier terms Flaubert's "style machiné aux jointures visibles" (*CHH* 2: 409). Both the fictional and the documentary interpretive approaches to *Salammbô* subvert the possibility that the events, beings, objects, landscapes, and architecture presented by the writer have exact replicas in nature. To this effect, Flaubert tells Feydeau that the story of the mercenary revolt is a historical event; however, a novel cannot be "aussi embêtant qu'un bouquin scientifique," otherwise it loses its artistic properties as a work of fiction – "il n'y a plus d'Art" (July 15, 1861).

Indeed, Flaubert sustains that his goal in *Salammbô* is to produce a fictional text "'d'un dessin farouche et extravagant,' comme dit notre père Montaigne" (to Ernest Feydeau, December 1857). By comparing his work to that of Montaigne, Flaubert astutely shifts the focus of the conversation about the value of *Salammbô* away from whether this text reproduces the conventions of the historical novel.[20] The writer instead emphasizes the fact that his novel's value, despite its thematic/historical focus, can only be determined within literary paradigms, according to the codes established by other works of fiction. As Michel Foucault points out brilliantly in his 1964 preface to *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, Flaubert's imaginary "ne se constitue pas contre le réel pour le nier ou le compenser; il s'étend entre les signes, de livre à livre, dans l'interstice des redites et des commentaires; il naît et se forme dans l'entre-deux des textes" (10). In light of Foucault's argument, *Salammbô* is to be regarded not as "a mirror of reality" but as the expression of "another reality" altogether. Jennifer Yee contends that Flaubert's

[20] See Green, Bem, and Dürr.

"Orientalist inventories are essentially and deliberately not manageable" (64). She then explains that in *Salammbô* the "anti-taxonomic listing creates not divisions into finite number, but an infinite, and chaotic profusion" (64). One of the most pertinent examples is the catalogue of the different geographical origins of mercenaries:

> Il y avait là des hommes de toutes les nations, des Ligures, des Lusitaniens, des Baléares, des Nègres, et de fugitifs de Rome. On entendait, à côté du lourd patois dorien, retentir les syllabes celtiques bruissantes comme des chars de bataille, et les terminaisons ioniennes se heurtaient aux consonnes du désert, âpres comme des cris de chacal. Le Grec se reconnaissait à sa taille mince, l'Egyptien à ses épaules remontées, le Cantabre à ses larges mollets. Des Cariens balançaient orgueilleusement les plumes de leur casque, des archers de Cappadoce s'étaient peint avec des jus d'herbes de larges fleurs sur le corps, et quelques Lydiens portant des robes de femmes dînaient en pantoufles et avec des boucles d'oreilles. D'autres, qui s'étaient par pompe barbouillés de vermillon, ressemblaient à des statues de corail. (qtd. Yee 65)

Yee uses this excerpt to prove Flaubert's subversion of meaning through the use of "complex and slipping signifying modes" that alternate nationality with language and physical attributes (65). However, this passage is pertinent to my analysis of Flaubert's politics of reception because it reveals the writer's tendency to precipitate his readers into this "[o]ther reality" through his stylistic of oversaturating the historical account with nonessential details. Ten pages into the novel, even the most diligent reader will be compelled to engage in a critical commentary about the author's stylistic choices, rather

than enjoying the events in the novel. We can see a similar technique to use generous catalogues, specialized jargon, and incidental phrases in Goncourts' rendition of the lives of Louis XV's mistresses, work which aestheticizes the historical *milieu*.

In the preface to *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV,* dated February 1860, the Goncourt brothers address their readers directly and provide detailed explanations regarding the differences between canonically accepted history ("l'histoire politique") and their particular brand of historical account ("l'histoire sociale") (*Introduction* 1: IX). This new type of history, interested in "toute une société" (1: IX), is constructed by piecing together private accounts, unofficial documents, and works of art, sources that are overlooked by more traditional historical studies. "Ce sera dans ces reliques d'un temps," note proudly the Goncourts, "dans son art, dans son industrie, que l'historien cherchera et trouvera ses accords" (1: XIII). Essentially, the Goncourts argue that the role of the social historian in this particular monograph is to instill "cette vie de la ressemblance, la physionomie de ce qu'il aura voulu peindre," while nevertheless supplementing these materials with a sturdy moral lesson about the corrupting influence of Madame de la Tournelle, Madame de Pompadour, and Madame du Barry, who apparently brought to their knees not only Louis XV but also the entirety of the French monarchy (1: XIII). By differentiating between "histoire sociale" and "histoire politique" the Goncourts communicate to their readers that, while they use documentary sources, they nevertheless select which information to focus on extensively, which information to mention in passing, and what to leave out completely. In this sense, the Goncourts, similarly to Flaubert, use documentary evidence to render the milieu in an imaginative manner that relies on artistic license.

An attentive reading of the Goncourts' monograph reveals that the historical figures depicted, who (unlike Flaubert's Carthaginian priestess of Tanit) *do* have exact correspondents in the historical record, nevertheless turn out to be as fanciful as Salammbô. Madame de la Tournelle, Madame de Pompadour, and Madame du Barry are framed in a theatrical manner within the narrative due to the use of the same type of "détail infime et réducteur" that is the trademark of Flaubert's descriptive style (Debary-Genette 334). These three mistresses of Louis XV exhibit eccentric mannerisms and psychology, wear ostentatious outfits, and inhabit ornately decorated interiors, all of which confers upon them a very artificial allure. The systematic intrusion of the authorial voice(s) within the text, which meticulously examine every gesture of these famous women, impairs the very "vie de la ressemblance" that the authorial voices pledge to recreate (1: XIII). In addition, the disruptive presence of several original social-historical sources (appearing textually in the form of extensive and abundant footnotes) undermines the illusion of reality, their presence amounting to an intellectual dialogue between these "reliques d'un temps" and displacing the story of the courtesans in what Foucault calls "l'entre-deux des textes" (10).

Gustave Moreau follows a pattern similar to Flaubert and the Goncourts, who placed their historical figures in this "entre-deux des textes" (Foucault 10). Peter Cooke provides a well-argued study of Moreau's original interpretation of history painting in the *Salome* canvases. According to Cooke, the "idealist history painter" sought to reinvigorate this academic genre, which had been reduced, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to "archeological pedantry" by the so-called Pompier painters,

generally considered to be disciples of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780 –1867).[21] About his *Salome Dancing before Herod* (oil on canvas 1874-76), Moreau writes: "Je suis obligé de tout inventer, ne voulant sous aucun prétexte me servir de la vieille friperie grecque classique" (*Écrits sur l'art* 99). In his 1874-1876 renditions of Salome, the biblical femme fatale, Moreau proposes an unconventional iconographical and technical approach, by constructing "a chimerical synthesis of ancient civilizations," which situates his artworks in the "entre-deux" of painterly referents (Cooke 529).

Moreau scholars, including Peter Cooke, Geneviève Lacambre, Marie-Cécile Forest, and Cynthia Burlingham, have analyzed the eclectic artistic and architectural sources that the painter utilized in his Salome canvases and have noted an impressive assortment of Italian, Indian, Moorish, Etruscan, Egyptian, and Chinese motifs.[22] Moreau used as a source of inspiration images from the *Magasin pittoresque* (1833-1938) an affordable periodical publication that included archeological illustrations. The painter astutely combined all these elements so as to create the feeling of an antique setting, populated by antique figures, without having to fix these elements within the canonical Greco-Roman socio-geographical and cultural framework (Burlingham 38; Cooke 529). The "iconographical syncretism" of the *Salome* paintings is coupled with an audacious treatment of the painted surface, which is highly ornate, with both minutely interspersed

[21] Bouguereau and Jean-Léon Gérôme were the most well-known of the artists whose works were mockingly associated with a distasteful academic genre called *peinture Pompier*. For a very complex discussion of this genre see Jacques Thuillier*, Peut-on parler d'une peinture pompier?* Peter Cooke also references Moreau's subversion of a type of archeological painting that became fashionable after the Pompeian digs in the article "Gustave Moreau's 'Salome': the poetics and politics of history painting," 528, 529.

[22] For a detailed examination of Gustave Moreau's sources for the *Salome* cycle see Burlingham's *A Strange Magic*, 34.

lines made of paint (*Salome Dancing Before Herod*, oil on canvas 1874-76, and *The Apparition*, watercolor 1874-76) and an elaborate embroidery of eclectic motifs, appears as if drawn on top of the painted surface (*Salome Tattooed*, oil on canvas 1874, and *The Apparition*, oil on canvas 1874-76) (Cooke "The Poetics and the Politics of History Painting" 529).

According to Heller and Cooke, Moreau's "emphatic assertion of the independent, material, and 'manufactured' existence of art works" is meant to draw attention to the originality and the independence of this creation – and its deliberate refusal to attempt an exact reproduction of reality --, while inviting viewers to reconsider their expectations related to the 'realistic' claims of history painting (Heller 151; Cooke 530). Moreau turns to Poussin's work, which he regards as a crucial example of relinquishing historical accuracy with a view to cultivating poetic license:

> Si l'on veut bien étudier son œuvre, on verra que, malgré son désir d'être vrai, exact, logique, raisonnable, etc., il ne peut jamais résister à ces entrainements féconds et souverains qui le poussent vers cette vérité relative du sentiment, vers cette logique sublime de l'imagination pure… (*L'Assembleur de rêves* 133-134)

Moreau interprets Poussin's work as a constant negotiation between a penchant for exactitude and a "logique de l'imagination." In Poussin's poetics, the appeal of these "entraînements féconds et souverains" eventually materializes in a conceptual paradigm governed by feeling and imagination, which becomes an indispensable component of artistic creativity.

In a similar way, Flaubert's creative impulses stand out due to his super-imposition of a second layer of fluid and dynamic images over what Victor Brombert defines as the immobile narrative of *Salammbô*.[23] In *Flaubert's 'Gueuloir'* Michael Fried argues that *Salammbô* represents Flaubert's "attempt to produce a work of literature which not only on the stylistic level… but in every other respect that the writer could control would be exclusively the product of conscious intention, of the faculty of will – 'volonté' – and which therefore would appear devoid of the effects of habit and automatism… continually at work in the prose of Madame Bovary" (117). Embellished with visible, material imprints that translate Gustave Moreau's inner fantasies, the "idealist history painting[s]" from the Salome cycle encourage the onlooker to interrogate "the very nature of the components with which the image is constructed" (Cooke 530; Heller 149). This is not to say, however, that Moreau's, Flaubert's, and the Goncourts' subversive discourses on art were designed to have the same extreme impact on their contemporaries as the non-figurative art of Kandinsky, or as the Nouveau Roman. Yet they were exercises meant to instruct the public to perceive written and painted artworks in a more open way, "separate from the objects of nature" (Heller 151). "Je voudrais écrire tout ce que je vois, non tel qu'il est, mais transfiguré," writes Flaubert to Louise Colet. "La narration exacte du fait réel le plus magnifique me serait impossible. Il me faudrait le *broder* encore" (August 26, 1853). Flaubert's statement perfectly captures the

[23] About the "immobility" of the novel's narrative, see Brombert's chapter entitled "*Salammbô*: The Epic of Immobility," 92-124, in *The Novels of Flaubert*.

aesthetic preoccupations of Moreau and the Goncourts alike, who regard historical and scientific accuracy as a means to a subjective, imaginative end.[24]

In this respect, Flaubert noted, in his response to Sainte-Beuve's criticism to *Salammbô*, that his novel was his attempt to "fixer un mirage" (December 23-24, 1862). Flaubert provides a detailed depiction of the experience of seeing a mirage in a letter to his mother:

> De temps à autre, il vous semble voir à l'horizon de grandes flaques d'eau avec des arbres qui se reflètent dedans et, tout au fond, sur la ligne extrême qui paraît toucher le ciel, une vapeur grise passe en courant comme un train de chemin de fer. C'est le mirage. (23 novembre 1849)

This phenomenon that Flaubert encountered in the Egyptian desert, can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the novelist's *ars poetica* if we read *Salammbô* as a mirage-like novel that appears to be very real and based on accurate documentary research, yet exists as a figment of the reader's imagination. As such, the mirage becomes a subjective and unstable optical illusion, whose contemplation produces feelings of wonderment. The spectators are aware of seeing an unrealistic image -- "il vous semble voir à l'horizon," "la ligne extrême qui paraît toucher le ciel" -- yet this realization that one is contemplating a factitious entity does not diminish the charm, the uniqueness, and the strangeness of this experience. Flaubert recreates textually an analogous experience in *Salammbô,* where the reading of the plot is encumbered by these recurrent images of dust, clouds, smoke, and refracting surfaces that produce dazzling effects of light. These fugitive impressions are comparable to the mirage-like "vapeur grise [qui] passe en

[24] Debray-Genette writes in "La figuration descriptive" that "le descripteur a … tendance à faire voir ce qu'il écrit, plutôt qu'à écrire ce qu'il voit" (52).

courant comme un train de chemin de fer" that Flaubert rendered in his letter. The role of these ethereal images is both to sustain the artistic illusion and to call attention to its artificial, constructed character, as an illusion created by the artist.

Moreau supports the Flaubertian conceptualization of the artist's freedom vis-à-vis nature in the creative process, when he notes that far from being "un esclave de la nature," the artist is in fact "le maître souverain" who, "bien loin d'être écrasé par elle, il la domine … par cet esprit qui domine les sphères…" (*Ecrits sur l'art* 361). The concept of mastery over nature, expressed in *Salammbô* and the 1874-76 *Salome* paintings, is given prominence in the over-saturation of the narrative and the material surface of the canvas with mirage-like, decorative, textured, and eye-catching layer of meaning. This technique complicates the action, disorients the readers and the beholders, and ultimately distracts them from the historical events that lose their autonomy and become subservient to the artistic production (July 15, 1861). As Jacques Neefs argues in "Le Parcours du Zaïmph," it is precisely this "garantie réaliste-documentaire" that paradoxically "coupe le livre du réel" (240).

Salammbô makes her first textual appearance as the flames and the smoke from the fire, lit by the mercenaries, illuminate her father's palace:

> L'incendie de l'un à l'autre gagnait tous les arbres, et les hautes masses de verdure, d'où s'échappaient de longues spirales blanches, semblaient des volcans qui commencent à fumer… Le palais s'éclaira d'un seul coup à sa plus haute terrasse, la porte du milieu s'ouvrit, et une femme, la fille d'Hamilcar elle-même, couverte de vêtements noirs, apparut sur le seuil. (*Salammbô* 11)

These elaborate optical effects set the scene theatrically for the apparition of the beautiful heroine Salammbô, who starts declaiming, in an operatic manner, her ancestors' heroism before her astounded audience -- the mercenary army who does not understand her "vieil idiome chananéen" (11).[25] Beyond this grandiose exhibition of operatic pomp that Sainte-Beuve disapproved of, this textual moment is significant because it eases the reader into the experience of the mirage- the "vapeur grise" as Flaubert wrote to his mother (23 novembre 1849).[26] These "longues spirales blanches" that change the contours of the objects, landscapes, and characters (in this particular example the forest suddenly metamorphoses into a volcano), become a leitmotif throughout the novel. Faced with these semantically changing contours, recreated textually by what Heller calls, in reference to the technique of Symbolist painters, a "manipulat[ion] of the mediums" (149), the readers of *Salammbô* need to adopt the attitude of the multicultural and multinational band of mercenaries. The members of this barbarian army, who do not share the same language, supplement their linguistic misunderstanding through a heightened use of their imaginative powers. This interpretive technique becomes clear in the banquet scene, when Salammbô addresses directly the mercenaries: "ils tâchaient de saisir ces vagues histoires qui se balançaient devant leur imagination, à travers l'obscurité des théogonies, comme des fantômes dans des nuages" (14). Similarly to the mercenaries,

[25] Both Culler (116-224) and Yee (63-82) provide a very rich and nuanced analysis of the role of language in Flaubert's construction of uncertainty and displacement of meaning in *Salammbô*.

[26] Sainte-Beuve is very irritated by the theatricality of certain episodes in Salammbô, which disrupt the realist illusion: "Il y a un certain effet, incontestablement, dans cette sortie de Mâtho, splendide et comme miraculeuse; mais c'est bien de l'extraordinaire et du théâtral, on l'avouera, pour un tableau qui vise à la réalité. Un de mes amis, qui n'est pas Français, il est vrai, et qui est sévère pour notre littérature, me disait à ce propos : 'N'avez-vous pas remarqué ? Il y a toujours de l'Opéra dans tout ce que font les Français, même ceux qui se piquent de réel'" (*CHH* 1: 425).

who rejoice in the priestess' speech without fully understanding her language, Flaubert seems to signal to his readers that, in order to enjoy *Salammbô*, one needs to acquiesce to the reading pact modeled by the comportment of the barbarian soldiers. If the readers accept the ambiguous beauty of the "fantômes dans les nuages" (14), without expecting to receive a pedantic lesson in Carthaginian history that they can reproduce in their daily conversations as a mark of their feigned erudition (like Monsieur Homais in *Madame Bovary*), then they will have a pleasurable and meaningful experience.

These "fantômes dans les nuages," these light and airy images punctuate major events in the plot of *Salammbô*. The motionless bay of Carthage, for instance, is suddenly animated by a whirlwind that swiftly alters the characteristics of the landscape: "Un nuage de poussière brune, perpendiculairement étalé, accourait en tourbillonnant; les palmiers se courbaient, le ciel disparaissait" (104). Later in the novel, when Flaubert depicts Hamilcar Barca's perfume workshop, the synecdoche "nuage de vapeur odorante" expresses the exquisite yet artificial nature of this enterprise. This imagery also highlights the fact that the craft of the novelist ultimately depends on the reader who has to both decipher this "vapeur" and to acknowledge that it is not a product of nature (151). Moreover, the trope of dust ("la poussière") signals the approach of either the Carthaginian or the mercenary army. As the conflict between the opposing camps escalates, the evening wind that agitates the desert sand also stirs the barbarians' melancholia for their native lands: "Un nuage de poudre grise retombait. Le vent du soir souffla; toutes les poitrines se dilatèrent…" (236). Decorative mists adorn the nude body of Salammbô, while she dances with her python in her moon-lit chambers: "La blanche lumière semblait l'envelopper d'un brouillard d'argent, la forme de ses pas humides

brillait sur les dalles, des étoiles palpitaient dans la profondeur de l'eau (…)" (209). The "brouillard d'argent" that drapes over Flaubert's heroine is homologous to the tattooed surface of Moreau's oil on canvas *Salome Dancing* (1874), also known as *Salome Tattooed*. The biblical heroine is depicted from the profile, standing in a hieratic position in the center of the canvas, as if frozen in a dance move. Her nude body is covered with black motifs, including a lotus flower that Huysmans would concentrate on in *A rebours* (1884). Cooke notes that Moreau's "bold accumulation and […] deliberate confusion of a thousand details taken from various ancient oriental civilizations distinctly enhance the expression of the artist's thought" ("Gustave Moreau's Salome" 531). These motifs, possibly inspired by the illustrations in the *Magasin Pittoresque*, resemble ink on skin, rather than paint on a canvas. Moreau further plays with textures by draping a blue shall-like fabric around the arms of the dancer. This iconography complicates the reading of the narrative, since the body, the fabric and the pillar on the left side of the picture are covered in these motifs, traced in the same technique. This painterly strategy draws attention to the existence of painted surfaces, rather than 'real' surfaces. Skin, fabric and marble pillars appear at the same time material and immaterial, a reflection of the natural world and a manufactured product.

In the gory scene from *Salammbô*, which takes place in the Defilé de la Hache, the diaphanous mists aestheticize the grisly sight of decomposing bodies: "La bruine qui tombait sur les cadavres, en les amollissant, fit bientôt de toute la plaine une large pourriture. Des vapeurs blanchâtres flottaient au-dessus; elles piquaient les narines, pénétraient la peau, troublaient les yeux…" (310). These poetic "vapeurs," which affect the senses of the mercenaries, nevertheless do not drive the intrigue, and they do not

provide new facts on the characters' psychology. Like the eclectic tattoos that question the three-dimensionality of Moreau's *Salome* (oil on canvas) Flaubert's vaporous imageries slow the reading and point to their nature as entities that exist outside of nature (Heller 151).

The Goncourts deploy a corresponding method of inundating the textual canvas of their novels with overwrought images of clouds, smoke, dust, and mist, the most salient examples being the descriptions of the Seine and those of the landscape of Paris in *Renée Mauperin* (1864), *Germine Lacerteux* (1865), and *Manette Salomon* (1867). Jean-Louis Cabanès remarks that the brothers' "volonté de dire le rien vaporeux" is one of the features of their *écriture artiste* as a poetic style (Cabanès 443). As an illustration of Edmond's and Jules' anti-Academic ideology on literature and art that I have discussed in Chapter II, this tactic is designed to corrode the 'purity' of historical accounts and to subvert French Classical tradition of the hierarchy of genres. In *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV*, the Goncourts amalgamate historical accuracy with poetic lyricism. For example, the brothers' embellished rendition of the gardens in the Château de Bellevue exemplifies their skill at organizing words and composing ornate tropes. That is because the beautiful *milieu* appears somewhat disconnected from the biography of the historical figures that represent the focus of their study and seems to overshadow them.

In *Salammbô*, another example of this aestheticized arrangement of diaphanous images that does not add much to the main plot is the scrupulous, yet confusing depiction of the the zaïmph. It is true that this sacred veil of the moon goddess Tanit plays a major part in the plot. Its sacrilegious theft fuels the conflict between the Carthaginians and the mercenaries while providing a rationale for the two intimate encounters between the

leader of the barbarian army and the Punic priestess.[27] However, its textual depiction is as deceptive and as decorative as the tattoos on the textured canvas of Moreau's *Salome Tattooed* and *The Apparition* (oil on canvas):

> Mais au-delà on aurait dit un nuage où étincelaient des étoiles ; des figures apparaissaient dans les profondeurs de ses plis : Eschmoûn avec les Kabires, quelques-uns des monstres déjà vus, les bêtes sacrées des Babylonions, puis d'autres qu'ils ne connaissaient pas. Cela passait comme un manteau sous le visage de l'idole, et remontant étalé sur le mur, s'accrochait par les angles, tout à la fois bleuâtre comme la nuit, jaune comme l'aurore, pourpre comme le soleil, nombreux, diaphane, étincelant, léger. (85)

Akin to a cloud ("on aurait dit un nuage"), yet refracting glimmering stars, the zaïmph is an illusory surface, similar to the textual surface, both light and solid ("nombreux, diaphane"), painted with images of the Punic gods and magical monsters. It also appears to change color, from dark blue to yellow and then to red, producing an abstract embroidery overlaid on the intrigue. Flaubert's focus on the veil's supernatural attributes marks a shift from a discourse constructed around verifiable sources into the world of fiction. Then the writer takes his readers one step further and emphasizes the artist-made nature of the text. Moreover, the Flaubertian use of the imperfect tense complicates the reading, if we consider Proust's argument in "A propos du 'style' de Flaubert" (1920) that this tense is the mark of a subjective point of view (6). The zaïmph is perceived through the eyes of a mystified and superstitious barbarian warrior, who recognizes the

[27] For a rigorous analysis of the role of the zaïmph see Jacques Neefs, "Le Parcours du Zaïmph," 227-241.

shapes of "des monstres dejà vus," but who is unable to pinpoint the consistency or the color of this object. We, the readers, have access only to his subjective point of view. The emergence of this unstable and obscure textual adornment heralds the fact that we are offered a glimpse into the imagination of the character who experiences a mirage-like state.[28]

The pictorial counterpart of the character Mâtho's fictional experience, which models the reader's experience of this mirage-like state, is Moreau's painting *The Apparition* (oil on canvas 1874-76). In the canvas, Salome, the bejeweled dancer, is rendered in a hieratic position, pointing at a floating, decapitated head of John the Baptist, whose sanctity is symbolized by an iridescent aura of generous proportions surrounding his head. As the title suggests, the apparition of the Saint could be an optical illusion fabricated by Salome's imagination. In his notes, Moreau refrains from providing a gloss of the subject matter, leaving the interpretation to the individual beholder. According to Moreau, the crucial element of this canvas is the facture. His stylistic preoccupation is discernible in *The Apparition* (oil on canvas), where the painted surface exhibits "heady color harmonies and … flickering impasted, yet extremely varied and subtle surfaces," highlighted by intricate decorative designs that bring to mind the intricate patterns of illuminated manuscripts (Cooke 530).

It is Moreau's conviction that the form, especially the intricacy of the painted surface, should spark the beholders' imaginative capacities: "Sans cesse et toujours cette

[28] Peled-Ginsburg notes that despite the fact that literary descriptions entail a production of meaning, this kind of description "does not reflect a full mastery and understanding of the object but is more truly a meaning-effect that narration and language inevitably (one may even say mechanically) produce" (109). She adds that the "text exposes the erroneous status of all acts of interpretation made by the characters, but does not counteract this exposure by offering other, valid interpretations" (113).

préoccupation de l'esprit français: être ému par le sujet, par la passion, par le cœur. Mais l'arabesque, la formule imaginative d'une nature plastique, la transformation et la transposition des formes, des contours, des lignes, de la couleur ; de tout cela, rien" (*L'Assembleur de rêves* 203). The metamorphosis of color and form that amounts to a "deliberate confusion of a thousand of details" in the *Salome* paintings is analogous to what Proust calls the "irréalité du décor" set forth in Flaubert's style, which generates a collapse of reading habits ("rupture des habitudes") (9).

In *Salammbô,* another major component of this pattern of textual layer with unstable contours is the extravagant and, at times, ludic iridescence produced by the glimmer of light onto disparate reflective surfaces. These refractions, optical illusions, and mirror images attract and distract the reader's attention from the primary intrigue. The sparkle of light can be of an abstract nature -- for instance, Salammbô's mental images triggered by the priest Schahabarim's erudite explanations: "des mots étranges… comme des éclair illuminant des abîmes" (753). Yet, more often than not this sparkle is produced by natural light -- the sun and the moon "les ondes immobiles resplendissaient…" (47-48) -- or it originates from artificial sources -- campfires, torches, incendiary blazes. For instance, inside Moloch's temple, the elders' fixed stance is counteracted by the scintillation of the torches onto the mother-of-pearl floor --"et le dallage de nacre semblait un fleuve lumineux qui, ruisselant de l'autel vers la porte, coulait sous leurs pieds nus" (128).

A further significant case in point is the moment in which Hamilcar, having just returned to Carthage, inspects his collection of precious stones. The light from his torch instills life into the dormant stones whose shimmer is transposed by the reflective

surfaces of gold shields -- “Elles fulguraient, pareilles à des éclaboussures de lait, à des glaçons bleus, à de la poussière d’argent, et jetaient leurs lumières en nappes, en rayons, en étoiles” (150). At the end of this lengthy textual spectacle, the anonymous narrator feels the need to intervene and reminds the reader, lost in contemplation, that Hamilcar “se délectait… dans la conscience de ses richesses,” in line with the historical figure’s political and economic status within Punic society (150). If we regard Flaubert’s rendition of the statesman Hamilcar as a “a titan of ‘volonté’” and a “superb military and political leader” (Fried 125; Dürr 78) who is only interested in the pecuniary aspect of his precious stone collection, then it is plausible to interpret this description, not as a magic lantern show, but as a scene that reflects the general’s character. However, there is another, similar instance in the text that indisputably focuses on aesthetic and ludic pleasure. Later in the plot, in an intricate triangulation of reflections, Salammbô, who prepares to seduce Mâtho and retrieve the sacred zaïmph, takes a moment to admire herself in the mirror:

> Les clartés des candélabres avivaient le fard de ses joues, l’or de ses vêtements, la blancheur de sa peau ; elle avait autour de la taille, sur les bras, sur les mains et aux doigts des pieds, une telle abondance de pierreries que le miroir, comme un soleil, lui renvoyait des rayons ; et Salammbô, debout à côté de Taanach se penchant pour la voir, souriait dans cet éblouissement. (211)

Reflected in the mirror, Salammbô’s jewelry provides a dazzling spectacle that is meant to be enjoyed, as the text points out, by the heroine, her servant, and the reader. In this pictorial description, the “abondance de pierreries” is enlivened (“avivait”) by the light of

the chandeliers and the surface of the mirror, provoking poetic rapture. Flaubert gives to the iridescent objects the same importance as to the animate beings. Flaubert's effacement of such hierarchies is, according to Rancière's talk *La Politique de la fiction*, a politicized literary act (February 9, 2012). For the philosopher this fictional technique is emblematic of "une rupture des hiérarchies traditionnelles qui organisaient la fiction réaliste" (February 9, 2012). In fact, as I have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Rancière contends that the "démocratie en littérature" translates to "l'égalité de tous les êtres, de toutes les choses… offerts à la vue"(February 9, 2012). In this complex scene of *Salammbô,* Flaubert signals to his readers that the bedazzling, mirage-like imaginary constructions that populate his narrative, and narratives in general, are fabricated by him as an artist. He therefore chooses to play with the legibility of his fictional text in the same way he chooses to linger on the rendition of the priestess' jewelry, rather than on her thought process.[29]

In *Salammbô,* the attention to clothing represents another constitutive element of this overtly manufactured layer of meaning added onto the plot. Culler argues that if Flaubert "never fulfilled his ambition to write 'un livre sur rien' he at least made it more difficult to define a given novel as a statement 'about' something in particular" (15). In

[29] Similarly, in *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV,* the Goncourts, inspired by the *Mémoires du duc de Luynes*, depict Madame de Mailly admiring, in the comfort of her chambers, the jewelry and the rich fabrics that the royal merchants set before her. Here, the "rayonnement des brocarts et des bijoux" is illustrated using fewer details in comparison to the passage from Flaubert. All the same, the subversion of realist hierarchies that Rancière indicated in Flaubert's work is equally evident in the treatment of Madame de Mailly. The 'realist' portrait of Louis XV's mistress becomes a pretext for the artistic erudition of the authors, who testify, in written form, to their great admiration of the Venetian school. Jacques Landrin argues in "L'art du portrait dans le *Journal* des Goncourt" that when they depict their contemporaries, Edmond and Jules often compare some of their physical traits to those found in the portraits of the great masters (137-150).

Flaubert's Carthaginian novel, instead of helping single out the main characters in the plot, the garments conceal their bodies and obscure their inner life. For instance, in the banquet scene, the mercenaries, and Mâtho especially, gaze in awe at the eponymous heroine, because they are moved by the splendor of her exquisite garments. Her attire is depicted as follows:

> Des tresses de perles attachées à ses tempes descendaient jusqu'aux coins de sa bouche, rose comme une grenade entrouverte. Il y avait sur sa poitrine un assemblage de pierres lumineuses, imitant par leur bigarrure les écailles d'une murène. Ses bras, garnis de diamants, sortaient nus de sa tunique sans manches, étoilée de fleurs rouges sur un fond tout noir… et son grand manteau de pourpre sombre…traînait derrière elle, faisant à chacun de ses pas comme une large vague qui la suivait. (12)

The epithet "grenade" is reminiscent of Mallarmé's source of inspiration for his heroine Hérodiade. However, for the purposes of this study I will not pursue this analogy any further. In Flaubert's text, the readers are told that Salammbô's attachment to her historical epoch is illustrated by her elaborate hairstyle "réunie en forme de tour selon la mode des vierges cananéennes" (12). This authorial intervention is a pertinent example of Flaubert's style "aux jointures visible" (*CHH* 2: 409). Its textual function is to motivate the extensive account of an inconsequential detail. Aside from this observation, her clothing, her jewelry, and her body remain very difficult to envisage. Michal Peled Ginsburg argues that in all of Salammbô's textual appearances, the literary portrait of the priestess is "a meaning-effect, that narration and language inevitably…produce" (109). This is because Salammbô exists as a manufactured textual presence that is held together

by her décor, her clothes and her devout belief in the goddess Tanit. While Flaubert concentrates on her attire, he refrains from giving her a distinctive personality and a particular physiognomy, as with Emma Bovary.

In a letter to Edmond de Goncourt, dated October 1857, Flaubert writes about the title of his Carthaginian novel: "C'est le nom de la fille d'Hamilcar, fille inventée par votre serviteur." Salammbô, therefore, does not appear to have a well-defined external referent, and her artificiality is barely disguised within the narrative. Her countenance and her psychological traits are barely mentioned, for example. It is difficult to picture her as a human being made of flesh and blood, as a person that one would recognize in the Parisian society of the nineteenth century. Instead, she becomes a work of art made up of a collage of gemstones. The "tresses de perles" divert the onlooker's view from her actual profile, while her figure is nothing more than a screen for an eye-catching "assemblage de pierres lumineuses." In addition, her arms are "garnis de diamants" and the shape of her body is annihilated by her mantle, made of "de pourpre sombre" that appears to counteract by its dynamic movement the hieratic pose of the figure, much like Moreau's *Salome dancing before Herod.* In Moreau's painting, the biblical seductress stands on her toes, with her left arm pointing in the distance, while holding a mystical flower in her right arm. The only indication of movement in the canvas is given by the decorative train of Salome's dress, which appears to be floating.[30] Yet, once Salammbô leaves the identifiable surroundings she inhabits, and once her face is veiled, she becomes unrecognizable. During the episode in the tent, Mâtho is misled by her "voile jaune à

[30] For an in-depth analysis of the role of dynamism versus stasis in Moreau's iconography of *Salome Dancing Before Herod* and *The Apparition* see Cooke's article "'It isn't a Dance': Gustave Moreau's 'Salome' and the 'Apparition,'" 214-232.

fleurs noires" (218). Meant to trick the mercenary army, the heroine's rudimentary disguise unexpectedly deceives the man who says that he is madly in love with her.

Similarly to Moreau's *Salome dancing before Herod* and *The Apparition* (watercolor), Salammbô's garments envelop her body in such a way as to maintain an aura of mystery, furthering the character's constructed, artificial nature. Moreau wrote that **"**dans ma *Salomé*, je voulais rendre une figure de Sybille et d'enchanteresse religieuse avec un caractère de mystère. J'ai alors conçu le costume qui est comme une châsse" (*Ecrits sur l'art* 99). The reliquary, like Salammbô's and Salome's costumes, was designed to be the material signal, for those who can and those who cannot read the holy scriptures alike, that they are in the presence of a sacred body, which should be respected, worshiped, and treasured.

The Fluid Nature of Interpretation and Modes of (Self)-Representation

In this context, Flaubert's refusal to have his novel illustrated relates to my discussion of the textured, dynamic, yet fluid and unstable layer of the text that veils and intertwines with the primary intrigue. Tooke calls Flaubert a "pictorialist writer" who used the visual arts in such a way that they became the "subtext which drives" his opus (*Flaubert and the Pictorial Arts* 2, 5). Flaubert's travel writing, and in particular his voyages to Italy in *Italie et Suisse* (1845) and to Egypt in *Voyage en Orient* (1849-1851), contain some of his most memorable commentaries on art (Tooke 23). Nevertheless, he was adamant about not having *Salammbô* illustrated, in spite of the fact that the novel contains some of the most lavish depictions of attire and scenery in Flaubert's opus. He

was, however, hopeful about collaborating with Reyer on an operatic adaption of this work (June 12, 1862). In fact, the Goncourts write, in their habitual caustic style, that "Mâtho n'est au fond qu'un ténor d'opéra dans un poème barbare" (*Journal* May 6, 1861).

In his famous letter to Ernest Duplan, Flaubert makes a very compelling argument against having himself and his work illustrated, stating that:

> Jamais, moi vivant, on ne m'illustrera, parce que: la plus belle description littéraire est dévorée par le plus piètre dessin. Du moment qu'un type est fixé par le crayon, il perd ce caractère de généralité… Une femme dessinée ressemble à une femme, voilà tout. L'idée est dès lors fermée, complète, et toutes les phrases sont inutiles, tandis qu'une femme écrite fait rêver à mille femmes. (June 12, 1862)

Here, Flaubert argues against illustration ("on ne m'illustrera") because he wants to avoid the qualities of completeness and groundedness for his novel, qualities that would provide a single and adequate interpretation, as opposed to the beautiful creativity of the imaginative phrases that "fait rêver." In this sense, Ginsburg observes that in *Salammbô* the author refrains from providing his readers with "any criteria by which we might construct a more adequate interpretation than the ones we find inside the novel" (113). Flaubert considered that a pictorial rendition of the novel's plot would destroy the delightful and hallucinating mirage-like imprecision that he personally experienced during his trip to the Orient, and that he strived to reproduce for the readers of *Salammbô.*

Additionally, the character Salammbô's attitude toward the goddess Tanit reflects Flaubert's own aesthetic anxieties on the subject of illustrating his novel: "l'idée d'un

dieu ne se dégageait pas nettement de sa représentation, et tenir ou même voir son simulacre, c'était lui prendre une part de sa vertu, et, en quelque sorte, le dominer" (52-53). The writer's apprehensions, disseminated in the inquisitive desire of the heroine to gain power over this idol, substantiate the hypothesis that once in possession of a simulacrum (a painted image) of an abstract entity, the public will strip that entity of its ideational, metaphysical status and dominate it.[31]

The diverse series of canvases, posters, sculptures, and costume-ball dresses that were inspired by Flaubert's novel and by the Punic priestess of Tanit, for the most part licentious in nature, attests to Flaubert's apprehensiveness. One of the reasons why *Salammbô* and its title heroine sparked the imagination of so many visual artists is the inscrutable and elusive nature of the literary descriptions proposed, which create a space for subjective interpretations. Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939) depicts Salammbô in his eponymous 1896 lithograph as a very statuesque, bare-chested goddess wearing an elaborate peacock headdress, whose neck and waist are adorned with intricate jewelry. Gaston Bussière (1862-1929) portrays Salammbô as a princess from one of Walter Scott's novels: fair-haired, blue eyed, and rosy-cheeked, wearing an intricate dress and staring directly at her viewers with a fixed and penetrating gaze. Georges Rochegrosse (1859-1938) focuses on Salammbô's sensuous dance with the python in his 1900 black

[31] Flaubert recommends to his fellow writer Louise Colet to disseminate some of her own traits in all of her characters, so as to make them more genuine and life-like: "Toi disséminée en tous, tes personnages vivront et au lieu d'une éternelle personnalité déclamatoire, qui ne peut même se constituer nettement, faute de détails précis qui lui manquent toujours à cause des travestissements qui la déguisent, on verra dans tes œuvres des foules humaines" (March 27, 1852).

and white composition. His representation of the enticing nude heroine, deploys the fin-de-siècle trope of the Oriental femme fatale.[32]

Of all these pictorial and sculptural renditions of the archaic, mysterious, lascivious, and intoxicating universe that Flaubert created in *Salammbô*, Moreau's *Salome* cycle is one of the few that capture perfectly the "distracting chromatic veil that helps to impede immediate intelligibility" (Cooke 532). Moreau notes in *L'Assembleur de rêves*: "[D]e la discrétion qu'il faut apporter dans l'expression du visage… ne rien trop affirmer à cet égard, afin que l'imagination du spectateur ne soit pas limitée dans le besoin d'idéal" (*L'Assembleur de rêves* 151-52). In Moreau's writing about art, which attests to his great concern with educating his public and enabling them to discern aesthetic choices, the painter advocates for the portrayal of mysterious faces that compel the beholder to ultimately adopt Flaubert's aesthetic attitude from his Punic novel and "invent[ent] du vraisemblable" (Goncourt, *Journal* May 11, 1859).

Judith Gautier, who, unlike her father, exhibited an unwavering admiration for Moreau's opus, discusses at length the *Salome* paintings in her art criticism.[33] Writing under the pen name Judith Walter, Gautier states that the public is usually despondent when an artist "touche à ces figures idéales que le rêve a souvent caressées."[34] Yet

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[32] For a discussion of the pictorial representations of the Punic priestess and the costumes they inspired see the chapter "Salammbô livrée, Gustave délivré," 111-133, in Vicaire's *Flaubert roi de Carthage*.

[33] Judith Gautier, Jean Lorrain, and Robert de Montesquiou were all on very familair terms with Gustave Moreau. For an analysis of their rapports see *Gustave Moreau, Théophile Gautier: Le rare, le singulier, l'étrange,* 75-79.

[34] Judith Gautier published her art criticism, entitled "Le Salon. II," on Sunday May 6, 1876, in *Le Rappel* No. 2248, 2-3. The article is reprinted, with its original pagination, in *Gustave Moreau, Théophile Gautier: Le rare, le singulier, l'étrange.*

Moreau succeeds in creating an image of Salome that does not render this biblical figure banal. As Judith Gautier notes, this is due to the fact that Moreau did not attempt to copy the face of his Salome from a physical model or previous artwork, but instead imagined it– "il a fermé les yeux et s'est recueilli" (*Le Rare, le singulier, l'étrange* 2). Unlike an earlier study for the *Salome* paintings, in which the model had very distinctive facial features, mundane and easily recognizable as one of the painter's contemporaries, *Salome Dancing before Herod* and *The Apparition* (watercolor), the paintings he exhibited at the Salon of 1876, bring to life "ces figures poétiques qui brillent confusément dans la brume des âges disparus" that fascinate Judith Gautier as both art critic and fellow artist (*Le Rare, le singulier, l'étrange* 2).

The contemporary artist Claudia Baez shows her admiration for Moreau's *Apparition* by providing an abstract rendition of in her canvas titled "*Someone had spoken to him of Odette as of a kept woman…an iridescent mixture of unknown and demonical qualities… as in some fantasy of Gustave Moreau…*" This painting is part of a series, created in 2013 and honoring the centenary of the publication of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In a Foucauldian game of intertextuality (the "entre-deux des textes"), Baez's canvas of the biblical figure emanates from a description of Moreau's painting made by Proust in *A la recherche*. The two paintings share a similar composition and iconography -- a female figure, standing near the left corner of the canvas close to the picture plane, pointing to what appears to be a floating head surrounded by rays of light. The materiality of the brush strokes, the impression of a textured, impasted canvas, and the vividness of the color palette, dominated by red and yellow and pink hues, appear to be a direct representation of one of Moreau's earlier sketches for the Salome cycle (oil on

cardboard, 1878).[35] Moreau considered his sketch to be an unfinished study for his tableau. Baez, who displays an expressionistic pictorial style, intended for her tableau with sketch-like attributes to be a finished piece of art. What is of interest to my study is that the physiognomic indeterminacy of Baez's female figure that is enveloped in red attire, suggested through "quick, bold lines and white highlights" constitutes a valid representation of Flaubert's "femme écrite [qui] fait rêver à mille femmes" ("Paintings after Proust" 2; *Correspondence* June 12, 1862).

As Bernard Vouilloux and Raymonde Debray-Genette show, the accumulation of 'realistic,' mimetic details that make up Flaubertian and Goncourtian descriptions, ultimately results in obscurity, rather than intelligibility: "…l'ultime détail est important chez Flaubert par son caractère déceptif et minorisant. Plus s'enfle et progresse la description, plus elle court à sa perte" ("Traversée de l'espace descriptif" 335).

Proust's investigation of Flaubert's style further corroborates this view. In "A propos du 'style' de Flaubert" the author of *A la recherche du temps perdu* situates his aesthetic commentaries within the greater context of French art. He discusses his reactions to Flaubert's novels as both a reader, whose "voix intérieure … a été disciplinée pendant toute la durée de la levure à suivre le rythme … d'un Flaubert," and as a fellow writer, one who needs to forge his personal and original style ("A propos du 'style' de Flaubert" 16-17). His article contains several unkind remarks, intertwined with pertinent and insightful reflections on Flaubert's writing techniques. Proust's rationale for writing this piece is nevertheless unexpected: "Si j'écris tout cela," affirms Proust, "pour la

[35] This is not to say that Moreau's sketch and Baez's painting were produced with what Arthur Danto calls the same "aboutness" or intentionality ("The Transfiguration of the Commonplace" 146). Danto defines the concept of "aboutness" as "something that is acquired when it is constructed as an artwork" (146).

défense (au sens où Joachim du Bellay l'entend) de Flaubert, que je n'aime pas beaucoup…c'est que j'ai l'impression que nous ne savons plus lire" ("A propos du 'style' de Flaubert" 19). Proust acknowledges, then, the value of Flaubert's writing, against "une littérature sinon creuse, du moins très légère" (14), acclaimed by a readership whose views on art had been fashioned by the tastes of Sainte-Beuve and of his (second-rate) protégés (20).

Proust's reaction to Flaubert's poetics takes us back to Sand's remark about *Salammbô*: "Est-ce de la belle et bonne peinture?" asks George Sand rhetorically. "Voilà ce dont il s'agit et ce que tout le monde est appelé à juger" (*La Presse* January 27, 1863). Proust's notions of the role of literature and its relation to the public align with the concerns of Flaubert and Moreau. The writer and the painter seek in *Salammbô* and the *Salome* paintings to teach the contemporary public to understand and appreciate a type of art whose quality cannot be verifiable in relation to mimetic reality or to factual evidence. Flaubert and Moreau seem to suggest that the value of their works can only be determined within the codes and protocols dictated by aesthetic strategies and formal criteria independently of or parallel to external reality. This debate on the artists' use of factual, documentary evidence according to their poetic temperament becomes even more poignant in *L'Œuvre*, Zola's pseudo-Naturalist novel that I will discuss in connection to Édouard Manet's aesthetics of the 1860s in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

ZOLA'S *L'ŒUVRE*, A *ROMAN À PIÈCES*

From Slave, Alexandra."'La lucidité de somnambule': Zola's Allegorical Depiction of Paris in *L'Œuvre.*" *Rurality Versus Urbanity in Zola*. *Excavatio* 25 (2015): 10-20.

> Le décor énorme d'Hugo, les imaginations géantes qui s'y promènent parmi l'éternelle bataille des antithèses, les avaient d'abord ravis en pleine épopée, gesticulant, allant voir le soleil se coucher derrière des ruines, regardant passer la vie sous un éclairage faux et superbe de cinquième acte. Puis, Musset était venu les bouleverser de sa passion et de ses larmes, ils écoutaient en lui battre leur propre cœur, un monde s'ouvrait plus humain, qui les conquérait par la pitié, par l'éternel cri de misère qu'ils devaient désormais entendre monter de toutes choses. (*L'Œuvre* 73)

In Chapter II, I argued that one of the most salient traits of the Goncourtian *écriture artiste* understood as an ideology on art and artists, is the brothers' subversion of tradition expressed in their anti-Academic stance. In Chapter III, I analyzed the ways in which, for Flaubert, writing like an artist means exposing to the readers the manufactured nature of literature, and implicitly educating them on the fact that novels need to be appreciated as works of fiction, not as carbon copies of reality. In the current chapter I analyze the way in which Émile Zola proves his originality as a writer by embracing the scientific, Positivist method, while still creating very lyrical and embellished literary tableaux. Zola's style in his 1885 novel *L'Œuvre* provides insight into Zola's incessant negotiation between his role as both a "médecin" and "romancier" which he theorized in *Le Roman expérimental* (324). Like the Goncourts, Zola has the conviction that

originality of thought and style is the mark of the artist. Like Flaubert, Zola adopts a pedagogical stance towards his readers. Nevertheless, it is a proven fact that Zola's didactic approach to his public is much more pronounced than that of Flaubert. Jennifer M. Hecht in *The End of the Soul* is one of the numerous commentators to point out that Zola, like the republican politician Léon Gambetta, was a freethinker who advocated for scientific advancement as a way to social progress (5; 311). The writer's attitude needs to be understood in the context of France's loss of the Franco-Prussian war. As Henri Mitterand and Evlyn Gould contend, Zola was convinced that the country needed to embrace a type of logically oriented outlook, one supported by Naturalist fiction, which would safeguard the integrity of the Third Republic and would restore the country's lost luster on the international scene (Mitterand, "Zola devant la Commune"; Gould, "Émile Zola: From Happiness to Truth").

In this chapter I examine Zola's wavering attitude in *L'Œuvre* between lyrical embellishments and scientific analysis, prefigured in his ambivalent definition of Naturalism as "une oeuvre d'art" that is "un coin de la creation vu a travers un temperament (*Mes Haines* 25). This means that, if Zola professes to produce a type of literature inspired by Claude Bernard's Positivist method, he is also very careful to preserve his creative freedom from the dryness of mimetic observation. In *L'Œuvre*, Zola's attitude gives rise to the composite nature of the text, produced by accretion.[1] The *composite nature* as a manifestation of the concept of "écriture artiste" refers to a heterogeneous literary production that is constructed, or rather pieced together, from

[1] I have borrowed the concept of "accretion" from John Elderfield. In an interview with Anna Hammond, the art historian employs it to define the composite nature, or the "parts added to parts," of the aesthetics of Pierre Bonnard, Matisse, and Picasso (10).

tableaux. In turn, these tableaux are made up of detachable units that can stand out independently, thus subverting the consistency of a harmonious whole.

Before I begin my analysis, I need to explain a few of the key concepts utilized in this study. My use of the term ekphrasis draws on Philippe Hamon's definition as "la description littéraire (qu'elle soit intégrée ou non au récit) d'une œuvre d'art réelle ou imaginaire […] que va rencontrer le personnage dans la fiction" (*La Description littéraire* 8). For the purposes of this analysis I use the term *tableau* in the very broad sense of picture or image, as Zola utilizes it in his art criticism, and not in the evaluative sense of a finished, unified masterpiece, as Diderot conceived it in his Salons, thus setting a precedent for French critics (*Manet's Modernism* 278).

Critics including Pierre Sabatier, Robert Ricatte, Enzo Caraschi, and Jean-Louis Cabanès are among those who have discussed the disparateness of the Goncourtian opus, manifested on a stylistic and thematic level. They have argued that this disparateness ultimately influenced the opus' reception as a pure manifestation of art for art's sake. In my analysis I am indebted to Henri Mitterand's study of the influence of the Goncourts' novel *Germinie Lacerteux* on Zola's writing, as well as to Mitterand's analysis of the close relationship between Edmond and Jules, the already established writers, and their younger and very talented colleague.[2]

[2] "Par delà l'ouverture polémique du recueil," affirms Mitterand in the preface to *Mes Haines*, "il faut aller droit à deux grands textes: le compte rendu de *Germinie Lacerteux*, et 'M. Taine, artiste.' Ce sont les deux clés de voûte du livre, et aussi deux textes fondamentaux pour qui veut comprendre d'où vient Zola et quelles sont les bases de son esthétique" (iii). In the same preface Mitterand notes that, during his literary debuts, Zola positioned himself in relation to the "hommes marquants" of his time, amongst whom were the Goncourt brothers, who are featured in several articles on the theory of the novel from *Mes Haines* and *Le Roman expérimental* (ix).

Mitterand notes in "Le Regard d'Émile Zola" that there is a strong affinity between Zola's style, in the preparatory notes for his novels, and the style of the Goncourt *Journal*, an affinity that is almost imperceptible in the final version of the novels, due to Zola's drastic revisions and modifications that are meant to comply with his theories on Naturalism.[3] The study of earlier versions of Zola's texts attests to his active concern with what it means to write like an artist who has embraced a scientific approach to literature and the arts. Mitterand refers to the early stage of Zola's writing as an "œuvre primitive," "plusieurs fragments d'œuvre," and "textes de fondations," that the author purposefully reduces and restructures in view of his scientific agenda (73). Mitterand goes on to say that:

> Il y a là [in the preparatory notes] des dizaines d'instantanés inédits de Paris, en particulier, qui sont à eux seuls, et bien sûr dans le domaine des mots, autant de créations impressionnistes -- plus pures et plus spontanées que les pages publiées … on est bien obligé d'imaginer un Zola flâneur, contemplatif et rêveur, captivé par l'animation du monde autour de lui. … Un Zola curieux, aussi, jamais satisfait d'avoir assez vu, d'avoir approché d'assez près les formes mouvantes de la vie …(74)

Mitterand's reflection on "un Zola curieux" and "jamais satisfait d'avoir assez vu" is telling for my analysis, because it unveils the heterogeneous nature of the writer's thoughts, which generates a complex, multi-layered structure to his work.[4] This

[3] Further references to this edition of the Goncourt *Journal* will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *J*.

[4] In *Positivist Thought in France During the Second Empire,* D. G. Charlton explores the work of the major positivist thinkers of the nineteenth century -- Comte, Renan, Taine, Littré, and Claude Bernard -- in order to reveal the inconsistencies inherent in their theories, which point to what he

ambivalence is at the core of Zola's tendency to piece together in his novels elements that appear to be in disharmony with each other, to varying degrees. The unearthing of Zola's preparatory notes reveals a divergence between the writer's lyrical, poetic, and exuberant propensities on the one hand – Zola as "flâneur, contemplatif et rêveur" -- and his dry, logical, and scientific approach to nature, on the other hand. These 'dizaines d'instantanés inedits' demonstrate Zola's predisposition for idealizing the landscape of Paris and its surroundings in meaningful tableaux, and serve to translate his aesthetic theories into writing.

Zola's tendency towards an analytic and objective approach to external reality, one that confirms his theoretical writings from *Le Roman expérimental*, determines him to self-censor the overly effusive passages from the final version of his works. Mitterand is thus right in affirming that the examination of Zola's self-censored tendencies from his preparatory notes "peut modifier notre conception même du personnage de Zola écrivain" ("Le Regard d'Émile Zola" 74). In fact, the significant disunity between Zola's spontaneous notations and the overly rationalized final product opens the way for alternative approaches to his entire opus:

> Ce n'est plus tout à fait ce bon tâcheron des lettres que nous dépeignent les manuels, ce primaire obstiné et étroit accumulant laborieusement les fiches, ce maçon construisant d'une truelle sans nuances et d'un grossier mortier des ouvrages solides, mais combien épais … (74)

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calls a "divided mind" (2). In his seminal work *Manet's Modernism*, Michael Fried defines *L'Œuvre* as the expression of a "divided structure," combining absorptive and non-absorptive elements (248).

According to the critic, this methodical Zola, who is interested in rendering the truth by applying Claude Bernard's experimental method, and who "accumul[e] laborieusement les fiches" in view of rendering an objective image, "sans nuances," of reality, has an imaginative and subjective alter ego, that he keeps in abeyance. The writer's continuous alternation between idealization and rationality, and between preparatory notes and published product, seems to undermine the stability and the grounding of his work, while emphasizing its depth and density – its "épais[seur]."

However, based on Zola's own remarks form *Le Roman expérimental*, I would like to steer Mitterand's premises in a slightly different direction, and propose two amendments.[5] First, if there is a lyrical Zola concealed by the positivist Zola, there are also telltale signs of the writer's contradictory tendencies, not only in his preparatory notes but also within the final, published versions of his novels. Second, if there are "pieces" (*morceaux*) or *tableaux* from Zola's texts which "se rapprochent souvent, par le genre et par le style, des pages du *Journal* des Goncourt" ("Le Regard d'Émile Zola" 74), these similarities are not limited to the *Journal*. Zola's *tableaux* bear resemblance to textual moments in the Goncourtian novels as well, to the extent that the *Journal* is the paradigm, the matrix of Edmond and Jules's writing. By stylistic similarities I mean moments of artistic exuberance in which Zola gives free rein to the imagination and subverts the precision of observations *d'après nature*.

Zola, who was very aware of the slippage towards idealization and fantasy occurring in his prose, draws a parallel between *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* and Edmond de Goncourt's *Les Frères Zemganno*, describing both texts as atypical works that contain

[5] Subsequent references to this edition of the *Roman Expérimental* will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *RE*.

elements that stray from their authors' general theoretical frameworks. "Est-ce que l'ignoble auteur de *l'Assommoir,*" Zola apologetically and to some extent ironically, in his review of Edmond de Goncourt's *Les Frères Zemganno*, "n'a pas écrit la deuxième partie de *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,* une idylle adamique, une sorte de symbole, des amours idéales dans un jardin qui n'existe pas?" (*RE* 441). Of course, Zola's main concern is to undermine Edmond de Goncourt's criticism of Zolian Naturalism which Edmond made clear in his preface to *Les Frères Zemganno.*[6] Yet the "auteur de *l'Assommoir,*" who is also the creator of "une idylle adamique," chooses to turn the debate about the methodology of the contemporary novel from an anti-Naturalist attack into an anti-Romantic tirade. Admitting his fascination, as an adolescent, with the Romantic paradigm (which he equates to an unrealistic view of nature and society in *Mes Haines* and *Le Roman expérimental*) the writer declares that, regardless of its subject matter, the Naturalist novel must abide by the scientific method in order to render the truth, refraining at all costs from the "tralala de notre queue romantique" (*RE* 445).[7]

By focusing on *L'Œuvre* (1885), Zola's text about the Parisian artistic milieu of the 1860s, framed by his art criticism *Mon Salon* (1866) and his essay "Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Édouard Manet" (1867), along with his theory of the novel as expressed in *Mes Haines: Causeries littéraires et artistiques* (1866) and *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), I explore these obfuscated "pieces" of Zola's writing as

[6] Edmond de Goncourt criticizes Zola's use of literary Naturalism to depict the lower social classes, and proposes to expand the scope of this literary movement to the analysis of "[les] hommes et [les] femmes du monde." He therefore contends that depicting the "canaille littéraire" has run its course (*RE* 441, 444).

[7] Later in this chapter, I discuss in more depth Zola's attitude towards what he refers to as his poetic "péché[s]" in the article "De la description" (*RE,* 427).

manifestations of anxieties and preoccupations that scientific formulas and regulations may infringe on the artist's creative freedom.[8] These beliefs where expressed in Édouard Manet's aesthetics of the 1860s, which, according to T.-J. Clark consisted of juxtaposing allegory and realist iconography. Manet combined prosaicness and idealization in the depiction the nude female figures from his prominent canvases *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) and *Olympia* (1865) so as to create unstable "sexual and social" identities, ranging from Muse, to the courtesan, and to "faubourienne" (Clark 79; 139).

I consider *L'Œuvre* no longer as a carefully constructed *roman à clé* or *roman à thèse,* but as a *roman à pieces,* an emblematic moment of dissonance in Zola's writing in which the fractures in his theory and practice of the novel are most apparent. In his articles "De la description" and "*Les Frères Zemganno,*" published in 1879 in *Le Roman expérimental*, Zola mentions scenes in *Une page d'amour, La Curée*, and *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* that are in dissonance with the overarching genetic determinism, by which I mean the theory of heredity, which is the driving force of his Naturalist plot. In *L'Œuvre* we can no longer speak of minor instances in which brief lyrical moments are intentionally sprinkled into the narrative to delight the reader, only to be subverted by, what Auerbach, reflecting on *Germinal,* calls "a certain dryness," an "excessive clarity," and a certain "inhumanity" of the general style (*Mimesis* 510). Instead, *L'Œuvre* loses its overall coherency if we remove the lyrical passages. In fact, Zola's novel about the Parisian avant-garde exhibiting in the 1863 Salon des Refusés, written immediately after *Germinal,* stages a clash between two equally matched, opposing tendencies: a lyrical,

[8] Subsequent references to this edition of *L'Œuvre*, *Mon Salon,* and *Mes Haines* will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviations *Œ*, *MS,* and *MH*.

symbolic drive -- the "œuvre primitive" that Mitterand discusses -- and a scientific, positivist propaganda ("Le Regard d'Émile Zola" 73). In this context, *L'Œuvre* presents itself as a "texte polysémique" constructed around these opposite tendencies, so closely interwoven that their separation affects the coherence of the narrative (*S/Z* 559).

Zola's Experimental Method

In 1865 Zola writes "Mes Haines," a series of articles published in the Lyonnais newspaper *Le Salut Public* (January 23 – December 14, 1865) that give the title to the collection *Mes Haines: Causeries littéraires et artistiques*. As "Mes Haines" demonstrates, as early as 1865, Zola had taken up the banner of science as the only path to social, political, and artistic progress.[9] "Nous sommes," writes Zola, "au seuil d'un siècle de science et de réalité, et nous chancelons, par instants, comme des hommes ivres, devant la grande lueur qui se lève en face de nous" (8). This passion for, and devotion to, the benefits of science is apparent throughout Zola's entire literary opus and has been extensively discussed in Zolian criticism.[10] Additionally, as Auerbach points out in *Mimesis*, a vivid interest in science was a stratagem for breaking with tradition.

[9] According to Henri Mitterand, in 1866 Zola gathered his articles under the title *Mes Haines: causeries littéraires et artistiques,* and Achille Faure published his volume of literary criticism. In 1879 Zola took out some articles from *Mes Haines* and added *Mon Salon.* This final version was published by Georges Charpentier's publishing house ("Présentation" to *Mes Haines* I-X).

[10] About Zola's penchant for science occurring prior to his reading of Bernard's famous *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale,* see the forward to *Thérèse Raquin.* See also Paul Alexis's book *Émile Zola: Notes d'un ami* and Fiorenzo and Silvana Conti's article "On Science and Literature: A Lesson from the Bernard-Zola Case," [this will be in the bibliography instead]. Regarding Zola's interest in medicine, see Garabed Eknoyan's "Medicine and the Case of Émile Zola" in *The Body and the Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*.

Therefore, artists who wished to be considered part of the vanguard adhered to this new train of thought (496). Yet, in these very early critical articles, Zola exposes his pendulations towards this unprecedented method: "nous chancelons (…) comme des hommes ivres" (8). The writer uses pathos very astutely to move his audience and to compel his readers to commend his mastery over momentary doubts and hardships before the (almost) biblical, and thus paradoxical "grande lueur" of science, "qui se lève en face de nous" (8). Situated within the context of Zola's entire opus, the passage also discloses his awareness of the limits of a "scientific" methodology. In *Le Roman expérimental* Zola claims to adopt and apply to his novels Claude Bernard's theory from *L'Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), so as to solidify his theory of "une littérature déterminée par la science" (324). Nevertheless, Zola is not very convincing in his argument that the "médecin" has to replace the "romancier" in order to provide literature "la rigueur d'une vérité scientifique" which suggests that the writer does not wholeheartedly endorse this theory (324).

In *L'Œuvre*, the scientific method is represented through the literary persona of Pierre Sandoz, a Naturalist novelist, who, similarly to Zola the theorist of the novel, is searching for the most suitable way to implement the scientific formula: "Bien sûr, c'est à la science que doivent s'adresser les romanciers et les poètes, elle est aujourd'hui l'unique source possible. Mais, voilà ! que lui prendre, comment marcher avec elle ? Tout de suite, je sens que je patauge…" (81). Here we encounter the same sense of bewilderment before the restraining framework of the scientific method, and the question of devising an accurate methodology arises once more. The use of the antithesis "marcher" versus "patauger" (a verb whose literal meaning is to walk with difficulty

though water or mud) brings to light the binary matrix that shapes the entire novel. The conflation of "médecin" and "romancier," apparent in *Le Roman expérimental,* is transmuted in *L'Œuvre,* in which the modern "romanciers" and "poètes" need to be scientists in order to capture contemporary truths. This synthesis is problematic and its instability lies at the core of the disparities, or the 'pieces,' that make up the novel's multi-layered structure.

The plot of the novel appears to be constructed around an escalating conflict between the vanguard painter Claude Lantier, who proves incapable of imposing his *plein air* aesthetics through a pivotal masterpiece, and his childhood friend, the Naturalist writer Pierre Sandoz, whose literary endeavor is successful. Upon closer inspection, this interpretive formula proves ineffective in accounting for the complex network of internal contradictions that inhabit the main characters and that echo Zola's extra-textual anxieties and preoccupations, voiced in his theoretical writings. More compellingly, the author stages a psychological drama in which both Claude and Pierre display fractured personalities, vacillating between Romantic impulses and a self-imposed adhesion to the scientific method. While Pierre, the writer, is able to deflect his lyrical inclinations from his art into his hobbies (collecting antiquities), Claude, the painter, opts for a non-naturalistic mode of representation, eventually concluding that he has betrayed his calling as a painter of contemporaneity.

In the article "Proudhon et Courbet," published in *Mes Haines*, Zola affirms that it is the artwork that provides genuine insight into that artist's view of the world, his feelings, his anxieties, his obsessions, and ultimately, his qualities and his flaws. "Je suis artiste," writes Zola, "et je vous donne ma chair et mon sang, mon cœur et ma pensée. Je

me mets nu devant vous, je me livre bon ou mauvais" (*MH* 25). Zola authorizes his readers to interpret his personality in light of his artistic production. By extrapolation to *L'Œuvre,* the author, who exposes himself "tout entier," might be thought to be discernable in both Claude and Pierre. Through this exposure, Zola plays the part of both the Naturalist writer and the idealist painter in a symbolic staging of his alter egos, and this staging ultimately alludes to extra-textual anxieties regarding the subordination of invention and imagination to science.[11]

L'Œuvre is a *roman à pièces* that reveals Zola's difficulty in harmonizing two opposite tendencies of his aesthetics: the freedom of artistic temperament versus the scientific rigidity of positivist thought. We can see these two tendencies in play in particular in the characteristic on Naturalism in *the novel*. Zola's definition of Naturalism from his article "Proudhon et Courbet," restated throughout *Mes Haines,* points out these two tendencies: "Une œuvre d'art," remarks Zola, "est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" (25). Thus, the scientific objectivity of the artist becomes questionable, since he offers a personal view of "the coin de la création," instead of reproducing likeness in a photographic manner. In his enthusiastic review of the Goncourts's *Germinie Lacerteux*, Zola enunciates his famous defense of the artist's complete freedom in relation to nature: "Par grâce, laissez-le [the artist] créer comme bon lui semble; il ne vous donnera jamais le création telle qu'elle est; il vous la donnera toujours vue à travers son tempérament" (*MH* 80). According to Mitterand, Zola is a tireless defender of the artist's aesthetic and political freedom, yet, at the same time, he is adamant about

[11] In an entry from April 10, 1886, Edmond de Goncourt mentions that Zola "a eu tort de s'introduire à la fois dans la peau de Sandoz et de Claude" (*J* 14: 110).

restricting this very artist to the rigorous boundaries of the scientific method, within which he might no longer be able to create "comme bon lui semble."[12]

In his 1879 articles published under the general title *Le Roman expérimental,* Zola returns to the issue of artistic freedom and proclaims that the "romancier" is not only an "observateur" and an "expérimentateur" (327), but also a man of genius, who bases his novels on a thesis -- "l'idée *a priori*" (339) -- and who subjects his characters to a number of tests, or to a series of fictional situations, in order to prove this thesis. It ensues that the experimental method enables the novelist to exhibit his full potential, "le laisse à toute son intelligence de penseur et à tout son génie de créateur. Il lui faudra voir, comprendre, inventer" (329). In this context, the noun "créateur" and the verb "inventer" have positive connotations, and Zola acknowledges the merits of those artists who possess the ability to invent and to create an original work. The confusion arises, however, when Zola drastically separates "créer" and "inventer" -- prerogatives of the Naturalist novel -- from "l'imagination," "l'idéalisation," and "le lyrisme" -- characteristics of Romantic and idealist literature. Disregarding the partial synonymy between "invention" and "imagination," Zola relegates the two notions to opposing camps in his bellicose view of the literary world as the locus of a ferocious confrontation between Romanticism/Idealism and Naturalism. As I have signaled at the beginning of the chapter, this turns into a discussion on the type of literature that can lead French citizens to progress and wellbeing.[13] In a direct address to the young generation, Zola points out

[12] On the topic of artistic freedom in Zola's writing, see Mitterand's preface to *Mes Haines* (1979 edition, pp. I-X).

[13] "Et je m'adresse, maintenant à la jeunesse française, je la conjure de réfléchir, avant de s'engager dans la voie de l'idéalisme ou dans la voie du naturalisme; car la grandeur de la nation, le salut de la patrie dépendent aujourd'hui de son choix" (*RE* 366).

the harmful social influence of 'idealism': "Et je m'adresse, maintenant à la jeunesse française, je la conjure de réfléchir, avant de s'engager dans la voie de l'idéalisme ou dans la voie du naturalisme; car la grandeur de la nation, le salut de la patrie dépendent aujourd'hui de son choix" (*RE* 366). As the creator of the Naturalist movement, he therefore maintains that the scientific approach to life, inherent to his method, will enable the advancement of French nation, and will guarantee its safety from its expansionist neighbor after 1871.[14] Zola' purpose in condemning the "gangrène romantique" (120) was to steer his readers towards science (equated with progress) in the hopes of creating "free, equal citizens" who will "build a 'fraternal' republic" (Gould 55).
Of course, this is a hugely optimistic and slightly arrogant claim on Zola's part, one which he nevertheless restates at several occasions in his theoretical writings.

Zola tries to reiterate his theory that the idealist aesthetics is pernicious and Naturalist aesthetics is beneficial in *L'Œuvre,* whose plot is constructed around the antithesis between Pierre, the symbolic exponent of "l'invention" and Claude, the symbolic champion of "l'imagination." In "Le Sens du réel," Zola emphasizes the "déchéance de l'imagination," which, according to his aesthetic theory, is the "caractéristique même du roman moderne" and, more broadly, of modern art (or art interested in contemporary issues), including the visual arts (*RE* 415).[15] For Zola,

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[14] See Jeremy Popkin, *A History of Modern France* p. 156-157.

[15] Zola's definition of the modern novel in "Le Sens du réel" was met with virulent disapproval, which determined him to temper his definitions of imagination and idealization. In the article "Les Documents humains" he writes: "Où et quand m'a-t-on surpris en train de boucher le ciel de la fantaisie, de nier chez l'homme le besoin de mentir, d'idéaliser, d'échapper au réel ? J'accepte tout homme, seulement je l'explique par la science" (*RE* 440). Behind his feigned indignation resides a strong disapproval of "la fantaisie" and "idéaliser," terms that, due to their grouping in

imagination, along with idealization and lyricism, constitutes a triptych of aesthetic lures that alienate a writer and his public from the path of reality and truth. "Lettre à la jeunesse," for example, is Zola's provocative statement against what he considers to be Hugo's misuse of imagination, idealization, and lyricism in *Ruy Blas*. The play's successful restaging in 1879 at the Comédie Française, at a time when, according to Zola, the progress of literature and society resided in the scientific method, irritated the writer, who used his review as an excuse to give another blow to the dreaded idealism of the Romantic school:

> On mène la jeunesse applaudir les vers sonores de *Ruy Blas*, on donne le cantique de M. Renan comme une solution exacte de la philosophie et de la science moderne, et des deux côtés on la grise de lyrisme, on lui emplit la tête de mots, on lui détraque le système nerveux avec cette musique, au point de lui faire croire que la morale et le patriotisme sont uniquement dans des phrases de rhétoriciens. … L'école romantique a fait du patriotisme une simple question de rhétorique. … Ce qu'il faut confesser très haut c'est qu'en 1870 nous avons été battus par l'esprit scientifique. … La folie du lyrisme ne peut faire naître que des fous héroïques, et il nous faut des soldats solides, sains d'esprit et de corps, marchant mathématiquement à la victoire. … C'est en appliquant la formule scientifique qu'elle [French youth] reprendra un jour l'Alsace et la Lorraine. (*RE* 366-70)

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the same category as the verb "mentir," acquire a pejorative sense and become implicitly opposed to truth, science, and progress, values that Zola strives to propagate through his novels.

The article reads as an anti-Romantic manifesto, and expands on Zola's views on Naturalist literature as the best exemplification of French national identity during the Third Republic. In this excerpt the writer, who employs very skillfully the jargon of contemporaneous medical treatises, tries to sever all ties with this haunting "folie du lyrisme." Having revered the "école romantique" in his adolescence, he now feels compelled to expose its destructive influence on French youth, and ultimately, its decisive role in the loss of the Franco-Prussian war.[16] Zola inherently correlates the victorious Prussians with science and the defeated French with lyricism, and, assuming the role of both humanitarian and political leader, he feels compelled to guide (and ultimately create) through his literature, the French "jeunesse," these "soldats solides" nourished by science and truth, who bear the burden of "reprendr[e] un jour l'Alsace et la Lorraine."[17] Indeed, if we consider this piece separately from Zola's treatise on the novel, this is a successful rhetorical product that gives the impression of a novelist completely engrossed in the "formule scientifique," one who forgoes all the elements that "grise[nt] de lyrisme, " "empli[ssent] la tête de mots," and "détraque[nt] le système nerveux."

Yet the writer's interest in the effects of socio-political phenomena appears as a transgression of the very scientific method he champions in the article "Le Roman

[16] "Fils de Romantiques," notes Henri Mitterand in the introduction to *Mes Haines*, "possédé comme eux par l'exaltation poétique, par le besoin du conte et du mythe, par la révolte contre les censures, il ne s'en tourne pas moins contre le Père. Au fond, tout se passe comme si, devant Taine, il revendiquait le droit romantique d'être pleinement soi-même, et comme si, devant Hugo, face aux hallucinations et aux prophéties du vieil exilé, il se raidissait dans la posture du critique tainien, absorbé par sa 'besogne d'anatomiste'" (*Mes Haines* VII).

[17] In *Dreyfus and the Literature of the Third Republic: Secularism and Tolerance in Zola, Barrès, Lazarre and Proust*, Evlyn Gould analyzes Zola's significant role in promoting and defending public education in the French Republic. Considering *Au Bonheur des dames* and *Vérité*, Gould draws attention to both Zola's "optimistic promotion of public education as a way of building the future solidarity of France" and to his "effort to empower educated readers" through his texts (54).

expérimental," an attitude that discloses his inclination to piece together a mosaic of lyrical and scientific motifs. "La science expérimentale," states Zola in his article, "ne doit pas s'inquiéter du *pourquoi* des choses; elle explique *le comment*, pas davantage" (325). Concentrating solely on the "comment" is clearly an insipid task for the talented and ambitious writer that is Zola, and therefore he cannot refrain from adding, in *L'Œuvre* in particular, exactly such scenes, ones that "détraquent le système nerveux" and ultimately "pren[nnet] le public à la gorge, " as he notes in his preparatory notes (*Les Manuscrits et les dessins de Zola* II: 219).[18] It becomes clear here that, for Zola, Naturalist literature that follows the Positivist approach, can teach its readers how to embrace "l'esprit scientifique" which will ultimately prevent the events from 1870 to happen again.

Returning now to Zola's tribulations between science and imagination, Mitterand skillfully addresses the writer's transgression against the positivist method and points out the existence of a "troisième Zola" (1898-1902), one interested in "utopian lyricism."[19] Yet there are salient instances in *Le Roman expérimental* (as I have shown in the excerpt above), and in *L'Œuvre,* that anticipate this lyrical phase in his art.[20] Zola's slippage from

[18] Further references to this edition of *Les Manuscrits et les dessins de Zola* will be indicated parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *Manuscrits.*

[19] In "Seul et debout" Mitterand mentions this "troisième Zola," referring to the ultimate phase in the author's life, from 1898-1902, a time when his writing reveals an increased shift towards social reform; it is at this time that Zola writes his "évangiles laïques" (*Zola, Cahier de l'exposition* 13). In Chapter II of *Dreyfus and the Literature of the Third Republic*, Evlyn Gould interprets Zola's interest in social reform as an "optimistic promotion of public education" aimed at "building the future solidarity of France" (54).

[20] In the general introduction to Zola's three volumes of original manuscripts, Mitterand pertinently argues that Zola's Naturalist project from the *Rougon Macquart* cycle is ultimately a product of his imagination: "Cette préparation et cette composition en apparence rigoureusement programmées, rapprochées des thèses de Zola sur l'observation et la documentation "naturaliste," sur l'assimilation du romancier au savant, et sur le "roman expérimental," ont pu répandre dans la

Positivism echoes the trajectory of the Goncourt brothers who, in their 1864 novel *Germinie Lacerteux* (which received a laudatory review from Zola), alternate a medical treatise on neurosis with biographical details related to the double life of their own servant Rose Malingre, set against a background of poetic descriptions of Paris, reflecting their anti-academic theories on art.[21] Auerbach considers this duality, apparent in the preface of *Germinie Lacerteux,* and points out that Edmond and Jules's "enthusiasm for science," partly determined by their desire to adhere to the latest contemporary trends, is attenuated by a "less modern position, a turn towards ethics, charity, and humanitarianism" (*Mimesis* 496).

The Goncourts, like Zola, actively negotiate their position in connection to the scientific method. If, as Auguste Comte proposes in his 1864 *Cours de philosophie positive*, positivist science has a "caractère relatif," based solely on observation and speculation "sans que l'exacte realité puisse être jamais, en aucun genre, parfaitement dévoilée," then the Goncourts and Zola juggle with scientific principles in order to

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tradition critique et pédagogique l'image d'un écrivain scientiste, esclave du document et prisonnier de la méthode. … En dépit de l'ambition encyclopédique du projet, qu'il ne faudrait pas sous-estimer, c'est une image illusoire, inexacte. … D'abord parce que Zola… n'a en tête que la recherche des péripéties d'une histoire fictive. … Ensuite parce que sa mémoire et sa culture infuses outrepassent de beaucoup l'apport de ses enquêtes et de ses lectures documentaires. … Enfin parce que l'image- aux deux sens du terme, ce qui est vu par le regard et ce qui est substitué à la mention banale du réel pour dévoiler son sens caché- est partout présente chez Zola, dans l'avant-texte aussi bien que dans le texte" (*Les Manuscrits et les dessins de Zola* I:11).

[21] In *La Création chez les Goncourt*, Ricatte provides a very meticulous account of Edmond and Jules's sources for *Germinie Lacerteux*: the sordid love affairs of their faithful servant Rose; the destitute life of their cousin Cornélie de Courmont, whose family was ruined after the French Revolution; and doctor Branchet's *Traité de l'Hysterie* (1857). Moreover, certain episodes of Parisian life are inspired by real events published in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* (248-303). Regarding some of the painterly descriptions of Paris from the novel, I claim in the conference paper entitled "The Manifestation of Japanese Landscape Motifs in *Germinie Lacerteux*" that these descriptions exhibit a series of themes and techniques inherent to the Japanese prints that Edmond and Jules collected.

philosophize on the role of art and the artist in society (IV, 216; qtd. Charlton 30). Yet, after the publication of *Germinie Lacerteux*, the Goncourts gladly sacrifice scientific conventions in order to maintain their claims to originality, which, as discussed in Chapter II, legitimate their role as tastemakers and trendsetters of the literary field during the second half of the nineteenth century. Comte himself abandons, towards the end of his life, science for scientism, and assumes the role of "social prophet," while Bernard, despite his thorough definition of the experimental method, reverts to "a theory of knowledge."[22]

"Tous les efforts de l'écrivain," declares Zola in his 1879 article "Le Sens du réel," "tendent à cacher l'imaginaire sous le réel" (*RE* 414). This choice of wording is telling in terms of the tension between artistic embellishment and the objective reproduction of extra-textual realities, at the core of the novel. For Zola, a good writer is *not* a scientist (seeing as a positivist scientist cannot claim to know that which is beyond verification), but an illusionist. As such, he mesmerizes his readers by obscuring ("cacher") the "imaginaire" beneath the "réel." The duality of Zola's articles from 1865, published in *Mes Haines,* is carried over in his theory of the novel, where the adjective "experimental," I claim, is no longer understood as the direct descendent of Bernard's method, but as the locus where the author's literary and aesthetic preoccupations are

[22] "Comte," writes Charlton in *Positivist Thought in France During the Second Empire*, "has not infrequently been accused of selecting the facts which support his theories and neglecting those which do not" (37-38). Charlton adds that the "caution and tentativeness of the scientist yield to the arbitrary assertions of the social prophet" (41). As for Bernard, "behind the scientific work," argues Charlton, "there lies, unavoidably, a theory of knowledge" (72).

being elaborated.[23] According to Zola's theory, the sincere and accurate rendition of the "réel" is the only conceivable way to achieve social, political, economic, and moral reforms in French society (Gould 54). In this paradigm, the "imaginaire" that Zola equates with the "folie du lyrisme" from "Lettre à la jeunesse" is depicted as a corruptive force in modern society (*RE* 366). Nevertheless, Zola doesn't endorse its complete obliteration, but merely its attenuation, its concealment, by the scientific jargon.

In *L'Œuvre*, however, the "imaginaire" is still present, and it disrupts the scientific theories expressed by the authorial voice and the characters Pierre and Claude. This is because the narrator's perspective doesn't always align with Zola's theories voiced in *Le Roman expérimental*, *Mes Haines*, *Mon Salon,* and "Une Nouvelle manière en peinture: Édouard Manet." In chapter IX, for instance, Claude initially plans to paint a prosaic scene of Parisian life, seen from the Pont des Saints-Pères, depicting on the left of the canvas "Paris qui travaille," with the working class of the "port Saint-Nicolas," and on the right of the canvas, "Paris qui s'amuse" and the "école de natation" (453; 495). In the center of the composition Claude places a boat, floating on the "large, immense" Seine, with the "Ile de la Cité triomphale" in the background, illuminated by the afternoon sun (453; 454). Gradually, however, the project for the large format piece suffers alterations, and the painter decides to place three female bathers in the boat, with the one in the foreground, close to the (imaginary) picture frame, being a nude. After numerous unsuccessful attempts at translating to the canvas the reality before his eyes, Claude becomes obsessed with the face of the nude female bather, modeled after his wife,

[23] Charlton is critical of Zola's application of the Bernards' experimental method to literature because this application does not abide by the latter's scientific ideals; Charlton also denounces the "absurdities of *Le Roman expérimental*" (*Positivist Thought* 77).

Christine. “Ah ! cet effort de création dans l’œuvre d’art,” thinks Claude, “cet effort de sang et de larmes dont il agonisait, pour créer de la chair, souffler de la vie! Toujours en bataille avec le réel, et toujours vaincu, la lutte contre l’Ange ! Il se brisait à cette besogne impossible de faire tenir toute la nature sur une toile” (516). Claude’s free indirect speech concentrates tension on his unsuccessful struggle with the “réel,” namely, his incapacity to both reproduce objectively on his canvas “toute la nature” in a manner that makes sense (that holds together) and to provide it that spark of life that would make the representation solid, genuine, a reflection of contemporaneity.

The narrator categorizes Claude as a failed, incomplete artist since the latter cannot live up to his full potential (“accoucher de son génie”) and is unable to revolutionize contemporary views on art through his canvases. (516). The character Claude does not master the technique of juggling “le réel” and “l’imaginaire,” and he lacks the ability to combine and organize the “pieces” of his *tableau* so as to dress up his fantasies and provide them with a “sens du réel” (“Le Sens du réel,” *RE* 415). Paradoxically, within the internal logic of the plot, Claude’s final choice to juxtapose the allegory of Paris as “la ville nue et passionnée, resplendissante d’une beauté de femme” with the prosaic scenes of city life is dismissed as the concoction of a madman who has lost his “vue claire” (763). More importantly, despite the overt narrative condemnation of the painter’s work as an appalling “fantasmagori[e]” (763), the disparate coupling of *reality* and *imagination* within the artwork, which amount to allegorization, is not devoid of meaning or aesthetic appeal. The ekphrasis encourages the viewer/ reader to regard the tableau as an expression of the creative individuality, which is based on a model in

nature. This goes back to Zola's definition of a Naturalist "oeuvre d'art," which is a "coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" (*MH* 25).

It ensues that in *L'Œuvre*, the vilification of allegory, idealization, and imagination is not absolute, since Claude's ekphrasis of Paris as a mythological goddess is one of the most gripping textual *tableau*x of the entire novel. The piece's resistance to interpretation (outside of the unsatisfactory explanation suggested by the plot, according to which the painting is the work of a madman), along with its *mise en scène* of unexpected couplings between factual reality and imaginative themes, is reminiscent of Édouard Manet's technique. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, exhibited at the 1863 Salon des refusés, and *Olympia*, exhibited at the 1865 Salon, utterly shocked Manet's contemporaries because these works proposed iconographies that were extremely difficult to read. In both cases, according to T.-J. Clark, the main female figure could be a nude, or rather a naked woman, placed in a prosaic, contemporary setting: a green landscape, resembling the places of leisure around the banks of the Seine, and an unembellished, somber room, possibly meant to be a brothel (79). She could also be an allegorical depiction (Clark 79). In "Le Salon de 1863" the art critic Théodore Pelloquet writes an unflattering review of Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, in which he addresses the seeming incoherence of the painting:

> L'exécution est loin de m'offrir une compensation suffisante ; c'est aussi un rébus. Je vois bien ça et là des morceaux qui approchent de la nature, particulièrement dans une des femmes nues et dans une des têtes de premier plan, mais cela ne suffit pas et le reste est d'une incohérence tout

à fait inexplicable. (qtd. in Fried, "Manet and His Generation: The Face of Painting in the 1860s" 64)

Pelloquet, like the character Pierre Sandoz in *L'Œuvre,* is dissatisfied with the painting because it both provides a realistic rendition of nature ("des morceaux qui approchent de la nature") and immediately effaces it, by alternating it with dissimilar pieces (morceaux) of a symbolic, idealized nature. Prominent Manet scholars, amongst whom Michael Fried, T.-J. Clark, and Carol Armstrong, have examined the potential impact of the painting on the viewer in terms of a resulting feeling of confusion and "incohérence." Yet it is this escape from the "restraints of genre" that, according to Fried, demonstrates the brilliance of Manet's masterpieces of the 1860s (*Manet's Modernism* 235). By extrapolation to Zola's *L'Œuvre*, it is this constant guessing game, or the uncertainty of several possible interpretations encapsulated in the artist's use of allegory as a middle ground between reality and imagination, that makes Claude Lantier's ekphrasis of Paris as a nude goddess such a powerful presence in the novel.

As a literary critic, Zola interprets the works of his contemporaries in considering how these works demonstrate a similar oscillation between *reality* and the *imagination*. He concludes that the productions of Balzac, the Goncourts, and Taine are manifestations of a split subjectivity. Unlike Victor Hugo, whose "mécanisme de la vision intérieure" (*MH* 103) allows him to ignore external reality in favor of fantasy and the imagination, Balzac is a "dormeur éveillé qui rêve et crée parfois des figures curieuses" (*RE* 418), while the Goncourts "se laissent aller au plaisir de décrire, en artistes qui jouent avec la langue" (*RE* 426) and Taine is "un homme sec et positif" doubled by a "poète prodigue"

(*MH* 204). Zola provides a very perspicacious reading of the tendencies inherent to the work of Balzac, the Goncourts, and Taine.

Zola's acute sensitivity to textual ambivalence, caused by antagonistic impulses and pieced together within the same text, is telling of his own stylistic, philosophical, and political preoccupations. For Zola literature is a powerful tool that shapes the minds of the "jeunesse" and determines important social and political outcomes. This is discernible in Zola's statement that "l'observateur et l'expérimentateur sont les seuls qui travaillent à la puissance et au bonheur de l'homme, en le rendant peu à peu le maître de la nature" (*RE* 340). According to Zola's theory, scientific, Naturalist literature, in teaching the individual how to analyze and gain mastery over 'nature' is the only vehicle for attaining truth, freedom, justice, and happiness. Zola disapproves of "la fantasmagorie de Balzac" and of his "imagination déréglée qui se jette dans toutes les exagérations" because of its arbitrariness, its overindulgence in the world of illusions. According to Zola's Naturalist doctrine that he expounds in "Lettre à la jeunesse," such behavior cannot provide the right guidance for the younger generations. It is a similar type of overindulgence that Zola condemns in *L'Œuvre,* in terms of Claude's ultimate choice of allegory and symbol over likeness (*RE* 418).

Goncourtian stylistics also fails to provide the support Zola needs in his endorsement of the scientific method, since Edmond and Jules have shown an inclination to anesthetize reality and create a heterogeneous world that, for the most part, subverts "la rigueur scientifique de l'étude des milieux, uniquement subordonnée à la

connaissance complète des personnages" ("De la Description," *RE* 426).[24] Edmond and Jules as aristocrats, exhibit their uniqueness vis-à-vis formulas and conventions through this creative, even visionary nature of the Goncourtian *écriture artiste*. Zola, therefore, needs to make use of this poetics in moderation, if he wants to be credible to the French "jeunesse." In the preface to *Art du dix-huitième siècle,* written in 1873 after the death of Jules, Edmond emphasizes the asymmetry of Goncourtian stylistics, emphasizing thus his relentless quest for new literary and artistic trends:

> Tout un mois, chaque année, au sortir des noires et mélancoliques études de la vie contemporaine, il était le travail dans lequel se récréait, comme en de riantes vacances, leur goût du temps passé. Et il y avait entre eux deux une émulation pour définir dans une phrase, pour faire dire à un mot le *cela* presque inexprimable qui est un objet d'art. (*Préfaces* 247-248)

Anticipating Zola's method of "cacher l'imaginaire sous le réel" (*RE* 414), Edmond de Goncourt reveals the multi-faceted ambivalence inherent to their concept and stylistics of *écriture artiste*. As the excerpt shows, Goncourtian stylistics, that reflects the brothers' ideology as trendsetters, move back and forth between two centuries: the eighteenth century and the second half of the nineteenth century. The former is the "temps passé" of the "objet d'art," a dreamscape condensed in the graceful, poetic, and imaginative paintings of Watteau, Chardin, Boucher, and Greuze, to name only a few of the eighteenth-century painters treated in their book. The latter is the time of the "vie contemporaine," or of positivist literature, with its feverish quest to reproduce everyday

[24] I have borrowed this notion of "esthétisation du réel" from Anne-Marie Perrin-Naffakh' s article on the Goncourt brothers, "Écriture artiste et esthétisation du réel dans *Germinie Lacerteux*."

life. The Goncourts claim to alternate their "noires et mélancoliques études" of contemporaneity with much shorter periods of "riantes vacances," dedicated to studying and critiquing the art of the previous century. The brothers, however, purposefully leave fluid the boundaries between these two tendencies. Their novels, their plays, their *Journal,* and even their historical writings attest to their desire to cultivate this aesthetic mode according to which an art object has a movable definition ("le *cela* presque inexprimable qui est un objet d'art"). Ultimately, seems to state Edmond, to be an artist, not a bourgeois, is to be constantly one step ahead of the contemporary schools of artistic thought.

Zola, who is inspired by the Goncourts' "indifférence aux convenances," wants to demonstrate his own stylistic ability as original writer (Bourdieu 294). Nevertheless, his strict Naturalist regulations provide little room for maneuver:

> […] le romancier est fait d'un observateur et d'un expérimentateur. L'observateur […] donne les faits tels qu'il les a observés […] Puis l'expérimentateur […] fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l'exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude […] Le romancier part à la recherche d'une vérité. (*RE* 327)

Zola, as an artist, sometimes strays from this "déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude" in order to express his poetic license. This catches the eye of the younger generation of writers, who take issue with what they see as the disparities of Zolian thought. In 1887, the year following the publication of *L'Œuvre*, Paul Bonnetain, J.-H. Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte, and Gustave Guiches publish in *Le Figaro*

"Le Manifeste des Cinq." In this polemical article, which echoes Zola's earlier iconoclastic writings from *Mes Haines* and *Le Roman expérimental*, the "jeunesse," represented by a group of young novelists who are eager to establish themselves in the literary world of the latter part of the century, attacks *La Terre.* The group sees Zola's novel as the decadent product of a morbid temperament, completely at odds with the precepts of literary Naturalism, as defined in *Le Roman expérimental*. Of course, this polemic is meant to shock in order to delineate the literary doctrine of the self-appointed *younger* generation from that of the now established "Maître" and his overbearing influence, an argument supported by Huysmans's preface to *A Rebours*.

For the purposes of my argument, I am more interested in the group's remark regarding the disconnect between Zola's theory and his practice of the novel:

> Zola, en effet, parjurait chaque jour davantage son programme. Incroyablement paresseux à l'expérimentation personnelle, armé de documents de pacotille, ramassés par des tiers, plein d'une enflure hugolique, d'autant plus énervante qu'il prêchait âprement la simplicité, croulant dans des rabâchages et des clichés perpétuels, il déconcertait les plus enthousiastes de ses disciples. ("Le Manifeste des Cinq," *Le Figaro* August 18, 1887)

The group implies that Zola has lost his edge and that he is rewriting the same motifs that have turned into tiresome "rabâchages" and "clichés." The writer is no longer the keen observer of nature, the scientist, or the experimenter, since his sources have become mere "documents de pacotille." Moreover, his style unsettles "les plus enthousiastes disciples" due to its deviation from the dryness of observation (theorized in the *Roman*

expérimental) into a lyrical mode "plein d'enflure hugolique." In short, the younger generation claims to be outraged by the laxity of Zola's scientific method. However, Bonnetain and his group are obviously inattentive readers of the Zolian theory, since they fail to note that the writer stays true to his initial definition of art (applicable to both literature and the visual arts), expressed in the article "Proudhon et Courbet": "Une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament" (*MH* 25). Or, as Zola himself has stated, albeit apologetically, in the review of Edmond de Goncourt's *Les Frères Zemganno*, his temperament is not a monolithic bloc, but a composite entity predisposed to this "imaginaire," shaped and informed by Hugo's conception of Romanticism. It follows that Zola's detractors are hasty in condemning the writer of committing perjury in *La Terre,* since his deviation from the scientific method is a slippage towards an earlier matrix of his writing (the "enflure hugolique") and not a deliberately deceitful attitude directed at his Positivist readers.

The plot of *L'Œuvre* anticipates the conceptual fractures of *La Terre* and its deviation from a strict Positivist outlook. The character Pierre Sandoz is a Naturalist writer (and one of Zola's fictional projections) who is prone to a similar antagonism between the "imaginaire," or a propensity for the "Moyen Âge vermoulu," and the "réel," an antagonism that he self-censors from his writing by channeling it into an artistic preoccupation outside of literature – into a passion for adorning his salon with antique objects of eclectic provenance, *pieced* together to create an overall decorative mood, disengaged from any functional utility.[25]

[25] Pierre Sandoz plans to write a series of novels on the destiny of one family living within a precise historical context, an undertaking which sums up the objective of the Rougon-Macquart cycle: "Je vais prendre une famille," says Pierre, "et j'en étudierai les membres, un à un, d'où ils viennent, où ils vont, comment ils réagissent les uns sur les autres; enfin, une humanité en petit, la

> Le salon, qu'ils [Pierre and Henriette] achevaient d'installer, s'encombrait de vieux meubles, de vieilles tapisseries, de bibelots de tous les peuples et de tous les siècles, un flot montant, débordant à cette heure. … Ils couraient ensemble les brocanteurs, ils avaient une rage joyeuse d'acheter; et lui contentait là d'anciens désirs de jeunesse, des ambitions romantiques, nées jadis de ses premières lectures ; si bien que cet écrivain, si farouchement moderne, se logeait dans le Moyen Âge vermoulu qu'il rêvait d'habiter à quinze ans. … Il n'avait rien du collectionneur, il était tout pour le décor, pour les grands effets d'ensemble ; et le salon, à la vérité, éclairé par deux lampes de vieux Delft, prenait des tons fanés très doux et très chauds, les ors éteints des dalmatiques réappliqués sur les sièges, les incrustations jaunies des cabinets italiens et des vitrines hollandaises, les teintes fondues des portières orientales, les cent petites notes des ivoires, des faïences, des émaux, pâlis par l'âge et se détachant contre la tenture neutre de la pièce, d'un rouge sombre. (687)

This practice of grouping exquisite and dissimilar objects allows Pierre to satisfy ("content[er]") his "anciens désirs de jeunesse, des ambitions romantiques" through a "rage joyeuse d'acheter." [26] Although Zola refrains from dedicating a book to the precious objects adorning his house, as Edmond de Goncourt does in *La Maison d'un*

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façon dont l'humanité pousse et se comporte... D'autre part, je mettrai mes bonshommes dans une période historique déterminée, ce qui me donnera le milieu et les circonstances, un morceau d'histoire…" (*Œ* 336).

[26] On the Goncourtian passion for collecting art objects, see Dominique Pety, *Les Goncourt et la collection: De l'objet d'art à l'art d'écrire*. In Chapter VIII Pety argues that the Goncourtian *écriture artiste* has been shaped by an aesthetics of collecting.

artiste (1880), certain aspects of Pierre Sandoz's salon bring to mind Edmond de Goncourt's (not entirely benevolent) account of Zola's studio in Médan, which he described as intermingling "une bibeloterie infecte" with "toute une défroque romantique" (*J* 13: 119).[27] Zola's taste for "bibloterie" is dismissed in the fictional realm, since Pierre Sandoz, one of his textual alter egos, "n'avait rien du collectionneur," and was interested only in the overall tone, the "grands effets d'ensemble." Yet Zola's passion for art and for the theoretical aspects related to its production, his sensitivity as an art critic, and his admiration for the painterly audacity of his lifelong friend Édouard Manet permeate this passage and set the mood of the entire novel.[28]

Manet reciprocates this admiration in turn, and his 1868 portrait of the writer in his study speaks to this passage from *L'Œuvre*. Manet's use of a subdued palette, dominated by dark colors, creates the sense of an intimate, timeworn space filled with rare objects, "pâlis par l'âge" and acquired from "brocanteurs," such as the old leather-bound books piled nonchalantly on top of each other, the elaborate inkwell, the Japanese artifacts, and the decorative chair on which the writer sits. Again, a taste for the Romanticized Middle Ages interlaces with a taste for the exotic, punctuated in the

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[27] June 20, 1881.

[28] The relationship between Zola and Manet has been discussed by both literary critics and art historians, and the complexity of their rapport has given rise to several equally pertinent yet divergent opinions. Clark, Fried, and Armstrong are amongst those who argue that Zola did not fully understand Manet's genius, but rather imposed his own ideology onto the painter's aesthetics. I agree with their theory inasmuch as the two artists approach reality and modernity in very different fashions: Manet's paintings are meant to raise questions and confront the beholder with feelings of uncertainty, to exhibit the changeability and contingency of modern life, as Clark, Fried and Armstrong contend. Zola's novels claim to show his readers the *truth* and to guide them towards social and moral progress. Regarding Zola's art criticism, Briony Fer notes that his "preoccupation with the means of representation, rather than with the subject depicted, has itself become a conventional way of talking about modern paintings" (Frascina, *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* 20).

excerpt from *L'Œuvre* by the eccentric and chaotic ("encombr[ant]") accumulation of "lampes de vieux Delft," "dalmatiques," the fictional materializations of the "défroques" from Médan, "cabinets italiens," "vitrines hollandaises," "portières orientales," "ivoires," "faïences," and "émaux." In Manet's painting the only modern element that disrupts this archaic atmosphere, subsumed by the epithet "vermoulu," is a small reproduction of *Olympia*, a reminder that this is the portrait of a writer who is "farouchement moderne." Both text and painting disclose Zola's pattern of dissimulating the "imaginaire" and camouflaging it within the very fabric of the "reel," amongst mundane objects of everyday use. The possession and contemplation of these objects produces a euphoric state, rendered by the sensuousness of the lexis. The reader who mentally penetrates the room "d'un rouge sombre," akin to J.-K. Huysmans's artistic interiors in *A Rebours* (1884), is unexpectedly swept away by the "flot montant, débordant" of objects; s/he is titillated by the "rage joyeuse" of being in the vicinity of beautiful things, reminded of personal "désirs de jeunesse," and enthralled by the synesthetic experience produced by the "tons fanés très doux et très chauds" being fused with the "ors éteints" brought to life by the glimmer of antique lamps.

In his didactic text "La Formule critique appliquée au roman," Zola emphasizes that the artist's creations are direct reflections of his personality and temperament. "Désormais," states the writer, "on ne séparera plus l'homme de son œuvre, on étudiera celui-ci pour comprendre celle-là" (*RE* 422). It follows that the discrepancies and disunity of Zola's own theoretical framework are intimately connected with the dialectic tendencies that shape his *temperament*. These polar tendencies arise from an attempt to dissimulate the "imaginaire" (equated with lyricism and idealism) under the "réel"

(understood as scientific truth) within the same text. "Adieu la belle unité de la théorie," states Zola in his1866 article "M. H. Taine Artiste," "Ce n'est plus l'application exacte d'une loi simple et claire; c'est la libre intuition, le jugement délié et ingénieux d'une intelligence savante" (*MH* 221). Of course, when Zola expresses this judgment regarding Hippolyte Taine's rejection of "une loi simple et claire" in favor of a less conscious state dictated by "la libre intuition," he unintentionally passes judgment on the merits and shortcomings of his own literary work, ultimately disclosing the disunity at the core of his own thought: "adieu la belle unité de la théorie" (*MH* 221).

Claude Lantier's Allegory of Paris as the Expression of Zola's Vacillation Between Idealization and Scientific Objectivity

A lyrical Zola, who, as the novelist himself remarks upon introspection, is endowed with "une cervelle de poète," intrudes upon the methodical, Naturalist, and Positivist Zola ("De la description," *RE* 426). This alternate side of the writer's "tempérament" makes him very responsive to the spectacle of nature and inspires him to create "poèmes de clartés et de parfums" that are counterbalanced by his numerous and rigorous observations *d'après nature* ("De la description," *RE* 427). Henri Mitterand pertinently notes in the introduction to *Les Manuscrits et les dessins de Zola* that, despite the "ambition encyclopédique du projet, qu'il ne faudrait pas sous-estimer," the writer's scientific objectivity is, in fact, "une image illusoire" (I: 11). Zola's penchant for the poetic proliferates lyrical textual moments in spite of his self-censoring practices, and Huysmans does not shy away from affirming, in the retrospective preface to *A Rebours*,

written twenty years after the novel's first publication, that the *true* Zolian characters are the "décors" (V). For Huysmans, the "halles," the "magasins de nouveautés," the "chemins de fer," and the "mines" are the true focus of the novelist's attention, while the human beings that Zola claims to bring to life, to scrutinize, and, ultimately, to judge, are mere "figurants" (V). Huysmans's affirmation is clearly intended to undermine the authority and stability of the Naturalist movement that he had abandoned; yet his theory is not entirely exaggerated. To restate my overall claim, *L'Œuvre*, as *roman à pieces,* can be read as the vibrant and dramatic canvas upon which the cracks in Zola's theory, and we see that especially in the allegory of Paris.

As I noted in the beginning of the chapter, these disparities are dramatized by the apparent antithesis between Pierre Sandoz and Claude Lantier. Both start off as avant-garde artists, yet the fictional writer develops a technique that avails itself of the novelty of contemporary subject matter, while the fictional painter, this "foudroy[é] de l'œuvre" (543), fails to bring to fruition his desired *plein air* stylistics and, like Balzac, "se jette dans toutes les exagérations" (*RE* 418). In light of this argumentation I maintain that in this multi-layered text ("texte pluriel" according to Barthes), which allows for several levels of interpretation, both Pierre and Claude need to be regarded as Zola's textual projections (*S/Z* 582).

The primary narrative focuses on the adventures of Claude and Pierre and their six friends who seek their fortune in Paris: Louis Dubuche the architect, Fagerolles the academic painter, Mahoudeau the sculptor and his roommate Chaîne the painter, Jory the art critic, and Gagnière the landscape painter. The plot traces the rise of Pierre, who succeeds in the Parisian literary milieu, and the downfall of Claude, who is unable to

capture the essence of Paris in his canvases. On a meta-textual level, *L'Œuvre* can be read as a theoretical exploration of the most efficient technique to depict, through language, Paris as a character. The novel is also the site where Zola experiments with his theories on modern art, as expressed in his art criticism -- *Mon Salon* (1866) and his essay on Édouard Manet (1867). In this sense, *L'Œuvre* is a successor of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Manette Salomon* (1867), their novel on the Parisian artistic milieu of the 1850s. For the purposes of this study, I approach *Manette Salomon* and *L'Œuvre* as two independent works, not in considering the former as the original and the latter as a plagiarized version, as Edmond de Goncourt adamantly stated in his *Journal.*[29] Nor do I believe that *L'Œuvre* is "a narrative of positivist advance and universalist resolution," as Carol Armstrong proposes in her seminal work *Manet Manette* (51). Rather, I contend that both texts exhibit a heterogeneous aesthetics, which is a direct result of their authors' wavering attitudes between idealization and verisimilitude in their compulsion to recreate life ("faire vivre") through artistic means (*Œ* 163).

In an apologetic paragraph from "De la description," Zola justifies his creation of multiple poetic descriptions of the city of Paris from *Une page d'amour* (1878), which unsettles his own Naturalist theory:

> Dans la misère de ma jeunesse, j'habitais des greniers de faubourg, d'où l'on découvrait Paris entier. Ce grand Paris immobile et indifférent qui était toujours dans le cadre de ma fenêtre, me semblait comme le

[29] "Au fond," writes Edmond de Goncourt bitterly on April 5, 1886, "Zola n'est qu'un ressemeleur en littérature, et maintenant qu'il a fini de rééditer *Manette Salomon*, il s'apprête à recommencer *Les Paysans* de Balzac" (*J* 14: 108). Edmond is convinced that Zola plagiarized *Manette Salomon* and will have a strong disagreement with Zola on this topic, whose reverberations can be read in several *Journal* entries from April 1886.

> témoin muet, comme le confident tragique de mes joies et de mes tristesses. J'ai eu faim et j'ai pleuré devant lui ; et, devant lui, j'ai aimé, j'ai eu mes plus grands bonheurs. Eh bien ! dès ma vingtième année, j'avais rêvé d'écrire un roman, dont Paris, avec l'océan de ses toitures, serait un personnage, quelque chose comme le chœur antique. Il me fallait un drame intime, trois ou quatre créatures dans une petite chambre, puis l'immense ville à l'horizon, toujours présente, regardant avec ses yeux de pierre le tourment effroyable de ces créatures. C'est cette vieille idée que j'ai tenté de réaliser dans *Une page d'amour*. Voilà tout. (*RE* 427)

Zola's detractors immediately took issue with the superfluous nature of the five descriptions of Paris. This series of *tableaux* were vexing because they neither determined nor completed the main plot. Zola's account of the reasons for his aesthetic choice is surprisingly non-scientific. The writer's motivation, as he himself expresses it, is purely subjective, relating intimate states of mind ("mes joies et de mes tristesses;" "j'ai pleuré;" "j'ai aimé;" "j'ai eu mes plus grands bonheurs"). Moreover, the explication is disconcerting because the first-person narrator's interlocutor is an inanimate entity -- the city of Paris -- personified as a "confident tragique" and a "témoin muet." Far from being mere decoration for this "drame intime" envisaged by Zola, Paris is elevated to the status of "chœur antique," and endowed with a significant role in the plot development. Zola's treatment of Paris as an animate being is a clear subversion of the concepts of resemblance and verisimilitude, the pillars of his positivist project; yet the writer (as he would have us believe) chooses to neglect these concepts only temporarily, in view of a

higher purpose, that of telling *his* story, revealing his sensations and his obsession before this chimeric presence.

Moreover, the passage also indicates Zola's gendered perceptions. The excerpt proposes a fugitive, unstable image of Paris, progressing from a neutral and commonplace image -- "Paris immobile et indifférent" -- to a dynamic, masculine presence, that of a "confident tragique" and "témoin muet" to the authorial voice's suffering. Ultimately, this ambivalent entity theatrically morphs into a mystifying female figure. In this sense, Paris is conceived as a female idol, with *her* gigantic dimensions ("l'immense ville"), *her* ubiquitous presence, and *her* relentless scrutiny of human suffering ("ses yeux de pierre"). She is feared and revered by the narrative voice, a projection of the authorial agent, who disseminates (his) feelings of angst and desire onto "ces créatures" (*RE* 427), the characters within his plot who, according to Genette, are mere "effect[s] of the text" (136).[30] The internal logic from Zola's theoretical article on the role of literary description is apparent here in *L'Œuvre,* where Claude Lantier (like Pierre Sandonz) is a projection of his creator, one of the "créatures" performing the "drame intime," acted out under the unremitting gaze of Paris. Furthermore, Claude's rapport with the city develops from logical analysis into illogical adulation, a trajectory that seems to suggest that Zola's "vieille idée" from *Une Page d'amour* is still present in the back of his mind. In this context, Zola's project from *Une Page d'amour* appears

[30] My analysis stems from Genette's notion of "authorial agent" in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (146).

once more, reworked into the ekphrasis of Paris as an allegorical *femme fatale* from *L'Œuvre.*[31]

In the beginning of the novel, Claude Lantier's aesthetic project is reminiscent of Manet's 1879 letter to the Préfét de la Seine, in which the artist proposes to decorate the interior of the Hôtel de Ville with a series of vignettes depicting "le Ventre de Paris" and its very distinctive settings: "Paris-Halles, Paris-Chemins de fer, Paris-Pont, Paris-Souterrain, Paris-Courses et Jardins" (*Edouard Manet, Souvenirs* 94).[32] The fictional painter wishes to recompose a realistic picture of contemporary life through the use of a modern iconography: "la vie telle qu'elle passe dans les rues, la vie des pauvres et des riches, aux marchés, aux courses, sur les boulevards, au fond des ruelles populeuses; et tous les métiers en branle" (*Œ* 83). During the first half of the novel, Claude's art is socially engaged, and its unprejudiced choice of subjects, from both the upper and lower classes, is in line with Zola's and Manet's use of a variety of contemporary sources of inspiration. The common denominator of Claude's eclectic iconography is the city – Paris -- the "immobile et indifférent" Haussmannian container of modern life, this "cité neutre

[31] During Claude's funeral, Pierre exclaims, referring to the allegorical depiction of Paris: "Ah ! cette Femme … , c'est elle qui l'a étranglé" (762).

[32] In Chapter II, Claude, the young, eager, revolutionary artist shares his ambitious plans with his friend Pierre: "Ah ! tout voir et tout peindre !... Avoir des lieues de murailles à couvrir, décorer les gares, les halles, les mairies, tout ce qu'on bâtira, quand les architectes ne seront plus des crétins ! Et il ne faudra que des muscles et une tête solides, car ce ne sont pas les sujets qui manqueront... Hein ? La vie telle qu'elle passe dans les rues, la vie des pauvres et des riches, aux marchés, aux courses, sur les boulevards, au fond des ruelles populeuses ; et tous les métiers en branle ; et toutes les passions remises debout, sous le plein jour ; et les paysans, et les bêtes, et les campagnes !... Oui ! Toute la vie moderne ! Des fresques hautes comme le Panthéon !" (82-83). In Chapter XI, during a dinner organized by Pierre, Claude, increasingly doubtful about his ability to render the specificity of modern life in a masterpiece, exclaims nostalgically: "– Ah ! l'Hôtel-de-Ville, si je l'avais, moi, et si je pouvais !... C'était mon rêve, les murs de Paris à couvrir!" (705).

des peuples civilisés."[33]

As the plot progresses and Claude's canvases, painted in his revolutionary "plein air" technique, are continuously rejected by the academically trained jury of the official Salon, Paris turns into a "confident tragique" for the character, an entity to whom he can express his inner turmoil.[34] Claude's three rejected works have a pronounced socio-psychological interest, and represent the idea that human subjects are determined by their milieu: the poverty-stricken and malnourished "fillette" and "voyou" from Montmartre in winter, the members of the bourgeoisie enjoying a beautiful spring day in the Batignolles, and the enticing woman with a parasol, a possible *demi-mondaine*, crossing the Place du Carrousel on a torrid summer afternoon (*Œ* 429). Claude begins his artistic career as the heroic defender of an anti-academic style that programmatically promotes reality, beyond idealization:

> Ah ! la vie, la vie ! la sentir et la rendre dans sa réalité, l'aimer pour elle, y voir la seule beauté vraie, éternelle et changeante, ne pas avoir l'idée bête de l'anoblir en la châtrant, comprendre que les prétendues laideurs ne sont que les saillies des caractères, et faire vivre, et faire des hommes, la seule façon d'être Dieu ! (*Œ* 163)

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[33] Daly, "Étude générale," p. 33, quoted in T.-J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life,* p. 43. In Chapter I, "The View from Notre-Dame," pp. 23-78, Clark examines the changes occurring in Paris during and after the Haussmannization process, and concludes that this modernized version of the city is a place of "ambiguity" and "mixture of class and classification" (49).

[34] Although the subject matter of Claude's ekphrasis bears resemblance to Manet's iconography inspired by contemporary life, the fictional painter's technique of "plein air" and his use of a very vibrant palette situates him closer to the group of Impressionist painters. In Claude's paintings "la nature baignait dans de la vraie lumière, sous le jeu des reflets et la continuelle décomposition des couleurs," which is not reflected in the palette of Manet's canvases from the 1860s (428). Claude could be considered as a fictional missing link between Manet and the Impressionists.

This powerful aesthetic manifesto, imbued with Zolian rhetoric and didacticism, seems detached from the pages of *Mes Haines* and *Le Roman expérimental*. It restates that the artist's mission is to "faire vivre," to reproduce resemblance, despite its brutality or its mundaneness. Zolian critics have analyzed all these traits in depth, and I do not wish to reproduce their arguments here. Instead, I propose to concentrate on the very Baudelairean definition of "la beauté" proposed in this passage, an aesthetic concept whose main attributes are two antithetical terms: "éternelle et changeante." The conflation of these two incompatible features -- eternity and fugitiveness -- reveals the ambivalence of this ideologically charged discourse on the God-like artist. Baudelaire is one of the most recognizable advocates of this conception of modern art that brings together the "transitoire" and the "éternel" (695). "La modernité," affirms the poet in *Peintre de la vie moderne,* "c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable" (695). Although Zola refrains from overtly voicing his adhesion to Baudelaire's aesthetics, his paradoxical stance on modern art seems to be a tribute to the poet's theories.[35]

Rendering "la vie," "la réalité," and "la beauté vraie" raises questions regarding the accuracy and genuineness of representation within the Realist-Naturalist paradigm, and prefigures, on a textual level, Claude Lantier's path towards allegorization. On a meta-textual level it reflects the authorial voice's own deliberations on this complex

[35] In his 1867 essay on Édouard Manet, Zola described the painter as his alter-ego, a realist artist who disdains the concepts of "beau absolu" and of "perfection idéale" (338). Completely dismissing Baudelaire's influence on the painter, Zola disseminates his personality in the works of Manet and sees in the painter the exponent of his theories on the novel. "Il est ridicule," says Zola, "de vouloir faire un rêveur mystique d'un artiste obéissant à un pareil tempérament" (344). Carol Armstrong analyzes Zola's misreading of Manet's aesthetics in Chapters I and II of *Manet Manette.*

issue. Pierre Sandoz, the writer-character in *L'Œuvre*, admits that he too is haunted by the impossibility of rendering "la vérité trop vraie," to use Edmond de Goncourt's notion as quoted by Zola in his review of *Les Frères Zemganno* (*RE* 445). "Moi," notes the character Pierre in a textual confession that can also be read as a narrative aside of the authorial agent, "qui pousse mes bouquins jusqu'au bout, je me méprise de les sentir incomplets et mensongers, malgré mon effort" (*Œ* 774). As Zola's fictional alter-egos, Claude and Pierre make stylistic choices that are constructed around an ambivalent aesthetics, tightly knit within the fabric of the text, which enables the coexistence of two conflicting views on art: one interested in reality as resemblance, the other interested in imagination and rendering the sensations that reality evokes to the artist.

> D'ailleurs, le sujet restait le même : le port Saint- Nicolas à gauche, l'école de natation à droite, la Seine et la Cité au fond. Seulement, il [Pierre] demeura stupéfait en apercevant, à la place de la barque conduite par un marinier, une autre barque, très grande, tenant tout le milieu de la composition, et que trois femmes occupaient : une, en costume de bain, ramant ; une autre, assise au bord, les jambes dans l'eau, son corsage à demi arraché montrant l'épaule ; la troisième, toute droite, toute nue à la proue, d'une nudité si éclatante, qu'elle rayonnait comme un soleil. […]
>
> –… Ce n'est guère vraisemblable, cette femme nue, au beau milieu de Paris. …
>
> –Ah ! tu crois... Eh bien ! tant pis ! Qu'est-ce que ça fiche, si elle est bien peinte, ma bonne femme ? (495-496).

This instance of dialogue between Pierre and Claude emphasizes the changes in the painter's conception and execution of his "plein air" painting of Paris. As Nicolas Valazza remarks in *Crise de plume et souveraineté du pinceau,* this moment in the plot marks a shift from likeness to idealization in Claude's perception and execution of his canvas of Paris (213).

Following the pattern expressed in the excerpt from "De la description," Zola enacts his "vieille idée" of turning the city into a fictional character in Claude's canvas. In opting for an allegorical representation of the Cité, Claude partly disengages with modern life and relinquishes the goal of accurate reproduction of reality, pursuing instead irrationality and subjectivity. The exchange is mediated by an omniscient narrator who doubles as an art critic, and who is transfixed by the facture of the painted female body "d'une nudité si éclatante, qu'elle rayonnait comme un soleil." The three textual voices converge in a common fascination with this central female figure, and this, in turn, points to the complex connection between reality and allegory within the text. Claude's "bonne femme" is perplexing because, in the context envisaged by the painter, she can no longer be just that, an ordinary woman. The painted body transcends its human condition and morphs into an abstract idea that expresses the artist's conceptualization beyond the confines of intelligible reality.

In "The Structure of Allegorical Desire," Joel Fineman defines allegory as a "continued metaphor" that both permits and denies the identification of signifier and signified (45). "Distanced at the beginning from its source," says Fineman, "allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search

begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory" (45). This "fracture" at the core of allegory enables a continual postponement of gratification that fuels "insatiable desire," thus making allegory a very engaging mode of representation. Zola's choice of allegory as a mode of representation within his ekphrasis allows for an unlimited number of "signifier[s]," none of which is *the one*. This is a metaphor for the structural fracture at the core of *L'Œuvre* itself, since the novel proposes numerous *tableaux* of Paris, reproduced though painterly descriptions, yet none can be the one perfect signifier that renders the complete and full "réalité" of the city.

> Mais Claude s'entêtait, donnait des explications mauvaises et violentes, car il ne voulait pas avouer la vraie raison, une idée à lui si peu claire, qu'il n'aurait pu la dire avec netteté, le tourment d'un symbolisme secret, ce vieux regain de romantisme qui lui faisait incarner dans cette nudité la chair même de Paris, la ville nue et passionnée, resplendissante d'une beauté de femme. Et il y mettait encore sa propre passion, son amour des beaux ventres, des cuisses et des gorges fécondes, comme il brûlait d'en créer à pleines mains, pour les enfantements continus de son art. (497)

It is striking that the narrative imposes a single interpretation of the painting, one that condemns Claude's error in selecting allegory. The narrator's interpretation dwells on the pernicious influence of this mode of representation on the fictional painter. This authorial agent, posing as the voice of reason in the text, has access to Claude's most intimate thoughts, ones that the character himself is unable to voice ("il n'aurait pu la dire avec netteté"), and uses this demiurgical condition to pinpoint the nucleus of the problem: "ce vieux regain de romantisme" (497). The noun "regain" figuratively alludes to the

recrudescence of an incurable disease, a relapse of a previous disorder that assumes the troubling form of a "symbolisme secret."[36]

Throughout the novel, Romanticism is referred to as an ailment with disastrous consequences. This conceptualization is developed at length in the last chapter of *L'Œuvre,* in which Pierre overtly connects Claude's failure and subsequent suicide to his inability to escape the malignant influence of his Romantic upbringing. "Oui, notre génération a trempé jusqu'au ventre dans le romantisme," notes Pierre (762). Imparting Zolian rhetoric, the character suggests that the *idée reçue* of Romanticism clouds the judgment of his co-generationists, and emphasizes the belief that the "bains de réalité violente" (alluding to the treatment for mental disorders in the 19th century) are ineffective cures for this ailment (762).

The paragraph above further indicates Claude's dualistic nature in terms of the fact that he grafts cultural influences onto his fixation with certain parts of the female body -- "des beaux ventres, des cuisses et des gorges fécondes." These distinct parts of the body are pieced together into the fictional painting in an act of symbolic, misogynistic possession, with strong sexual connotations. Edmond de Goncourt interprets the unexpected textual emergence of this "obscène" bejeweled goddess as a machination on Zola's part, aimed at enticing male readers into buying "quelques milliers d'exemplaires" (*J* 14: 109).[37] Robert Niess suggests that the allegorical image, which torments the fictional painter, is a textual representation of Zola's "ideal woman" (161). Although I am not persuaded by these two analyses, which tend to simplify the textual and meta-

[36] For a discussion of Zola's complex relation with the Romantic aesthetics see Anita Brookner's *Romanticism and its Discontents*.

[37] April 5, 1886.

textual discourse of the novel, they do bring to light an intense pattern of desire for "la ville nue et passionnée" (497), followed by repression and "des bains de réalité violente" (762), then a subsequent relapse into desire, followed by an even more strict repression, a dynamic that resonates with the Zolian theory of the novel: "cacher l'imaginaire sous le réel" (*RE* 414).

Fineman's metaphor of the *fracture* at the core of allegory becomes even clearer if we return to Zola's choice to allegorize Paris in *Une page d'amour* (a choice retrospectively denigrated in "De la description") and use it as a tool for interpreting *L'Œuvre*. In so doing, we can see that the "immense ville à l'horizon, toujours présente, regardant avec ses yeux de pierre le tourment effroyable de ces créatures" (427) that Zola strived to recreate in *Une page d'amour* is a more subdued version of "cette idole d'une religion inconnue, faite de métaux, de marbres et de gemmes, épanouissant la rose mystique de son sexe, entre les colonnes précieuses des cuisses, sous la voûte sacrée du ventre" (*Œ* 739). Claude contemplates his work in a state of incredulity and his astonishment is rendered by a series of questions formulated in free indirect speech: "Qui donc venait de peindre cette idole…?"; "qui l'avait faite…?"; "Était-ce lui qui, sans le savoir, était l'ouvrier de ce symbole du désir…?" (739). The use here of the third-person personal pronoun "lui" is problematic because it allows for several possibilities of interpretation. On a textual level, it marks the conscious disengagement of the fictional creator from his fictional work. This fracture of the self is aggravated by the enigmatic source of the "désir" that fuels the work. The text specifies that it is *a* symbol of desire in general, not of *his* (the character Claude's) specific desire; thus, it can reflect an obsession of the textual "ouvrier," or of Zola himself, the tireless creator of literary Paris.

Malcolm Bowie might call this a Lacanian self, "caught between delusional wholeness" and "disintegration" (Bowie, *Lacan 28).* In his seminal work on Lacan, Malcolm Bowie discusses the psychoanalyst's theory of the "corps morcellé" and the "morcellement," and notes that the ego wavers between two opposing tendencies: totality and disunity. "Whatever it is that gives the ego its normal buoyancy," writes Bowie, "and allows the individual to do such straight-forward things as formulate and then execute a plan, has been moved to the margins of the theoretical picture" (*Lacan* 28). Lacan's concepts, analyzed and discussed by Bowie, are instrumental to my analysis of Pierre and Claude as expressions of the authorial self divided by two opposing tendencies in *L'Œuvre,* because they corroborate the idea that the self's wholeness is an illusion fueled by desire and fantasy.

The fragmentation of the self in this part of the novel is aggravated by the enigmatic source of the "désir" at the core of the work. Valazza suggests that Claude's large format painting of the nude goddess points to a sexual obsession with the woman ("la Femme" 209) on the part of both the fictional painter and his creator, Zola the novelist: "l'un n'a de cesse de peindre le sexe de la femme, l'autre de l'écrire" (215). I would like to suggest that the novelist's object of desire is the city of Paris, allegorized as a femme fatale. The "symbole du désir," or Paris as "la ville nue et passionnée, resplendissante d'une beauté de femme" (497), is the product of the artist's most intimate feelings, emotions, and fixations, unmitigated by any sense of Lacanian "delusional wholeness" (28). The work that ensues is a window, not into reality, but into the artist's temperament. "Qu'importe la vérité!" exclaims Zola in his 1866 article "Les Réalistes du salon," "si le mensonge est commis par un tempérament particulier et puissant" (*MH*

303). Indeed, Claude's allegorical rendition of Paris in his painting is the work of such a "tempérament particulier." In spite of the initial surprise it produces in its beholder, and regardless of its condemnation by the authorial agent, Claude's canvas and portrayal of the disconcerting female figure alludes to the limitations of mimetic representation. According to Charles Harrison, the Impressionist group of the 1870s questioned the validity of the Realistic reproduction of nature, because it imposed a synthesized perspective of reality; instead, the group proposed a subjective perspective that connected truth to personal sensation ("Impressionism, Modernism and Originality" 144).[38]

The public's generally negative reaction to his friend Manet's artistic innovations signals to Zola that art designed for the masses of French citizens of the Third Republic has to be intelligible, easily interpretable, and close to its referent. This is at odds with the kind of art that is produced by a creative temperament, the genius, the legitimate member of the artistic world. Zola felt he had to step in and defend his friend Manet's paintings from the derision of the general public in the hopes of educating the masses of French citizens and showing them that the artist is entitled to moments of unbridled, non-mimetic creativity.

Zola's ambition, expressed in *L'Œuvre*, is to produce a composite art that can hold in place these antithetical notions, an art that can appeal to all French citizens, both to the masses and to an elite group of aesthetes. This type of art, in order to satisfy this ambition, has to reproduce a world that is general enough to make sense to all, yet be

[38] In "Impressionism, Modernism and Originality," Charles Harrison argues that Impressionist aesthetics are very genuine in their rendition of nature, since they expose the inherent subjectivity of human perception: "In the 1870s the concept of art as 'impression' was associated with a 'modern' recognition of the inescapably subjective aspects of perception and experience. It was also associated with those stylistic characteristics in painting through which a personal and spontaneous vision was supposed to be expressed" (144).

flexible enough in its reproduction that it can still reflect the particular talent and individual imagination of its creator. Indeed, Zola is constantly reshaping and reformulating his influential rhetoric about the writer as a strict observer of reality, in order to account for the element of creative genius that he believes is necessary in preventing the artist from producing an uninspired, carbon copy of reality.[39] Claude's allegory of Paris as a "symbole du désir" tips the balance between "le réel" and "l'imaginaire" (understood in Zola's terms, not Lacan's) because it offers a glimpse into an individual, subjective, and pluralistic conceptualization of life.

Returning for a moment to Manet's aesthetics of the 1860s, Claude's allegorical nude figure surrounded by two female bathers with puzzling identities calls to mind the female bathers from the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), as well as the *demi-mondaine*-Venus from *Olympia* (1863), to name some of the painter's most controversial works. Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried propose a formalist and a Kantian approach to Manet's aforementioned paintings, Clark opts for a Marxist approach, and Armstrong offers a feminist critique. Nevertheless, they all point out that Manet's art is so appealing today because of its contradictory and paradoxical nature. In "Manet and His Generation: The Face of Painting in the 1860s," Michael Fried interprets Manet's "*unevenness* of execution" (65) as an aesthetic choice, not the result of a lack of artistic skill on the part of the painter. Fried concludes that this technique, which Manet's contemporaries found so strange and unsettling, was designed to reject absorption and to engage with the

[39] In "Quelle vanité que la peinture," Nathalie Heinich emphasizes the futility of evaluating paintings according to their mimetic qualities. "Or exiger de la peinture, avant toutes choses, la resemblance," says Heinich, "c'est effacer les marques de ce travail au profit du 'sujet,' dont la valeur (économique et/ ou symbolique) constitue alors le principal critère d'évaluation du tableau" (77).

painting's beholder. Fried argues that "what contemporary viewers saw as the bizarreness of Manet's paintings' facture- the resistance his execution offered even to those critics who, like Desnoyers, believed in his abilities- may be understood as a further manifestation of his radical rejection of the ideal of closure that was both ground and aim of absorptive painting" (65). Claude's uneven execution, rendered textually in terms reminiscent of Zola's art criticism of Édouard Manet, combines instances of vividness -- "le fini" -- with instances of sketchiness -- "l'ébauche" -- consistent with the aesthetics of the collage, that is, with the underlying principle of the entire novel.

In an elaborate game of doubling, the authorial agent in *L'Œuvre*, endowed with the eloquence of an art critic, describes Claude's painting through the eyes of the character Pierre. The piece is a composite entity, mixing an "ébauche magistrale" with "des morceaux très travaillés ceux-là, d'une belle puissance de facture" (546). Claude's painting, like Édouard Manet's aforementioned creations, confronts the beholder with a series of questions instead of providing the solace of a readable, simplistic universe. Both Michael Fried and T-J. Clark brilliantly articulate in their studies on Manet that the painter's modernity resides in how he renounces equivalence and exposes the painting as a surface covered in paint, an astute creation, an artifice whose main purpose is to be beheld, rather than to recreate nature, reality, or truth.[40] Claude's allegory of Paris is vexing to Pierre because it exacerbates the "gaps and perplexities" of his technique while making a travesty of the realistic pretention to render nature/reality *as it is* (Clark 10).

[40] In "Manet and His Generation: The Face of Painting in the 1860s," Fried interprets the flatness of Manet's paintings of the 1860s as "the product of an attempt to make the painting in its entirety – the painting as a painting, that is, as a *tableau* -- face the beholder as never before" (53). In *The Painting of Modern Life* T.-J. Clark asserts that Manet and his generation were "skeptical" about the "nature of representation in art" and that they were interested in "the evidence of palpable and frank inconsistency" (10).

> Seulement, la barque des femmes, au milieu, trouait le tableau d'un flamboiement de chairs qui n'étaient pas à leur place et la grande figure nue surtout peinte dans la fièvre, avait un éclat, un grandissement d'hallucination d'une fausseté étrange et déconcertante, au milieu des réalités voisines. (*Œ* 546)

The fictional beholder's response to the canvas, as seen in this passage, is that of uneasiness. Pierre clings to realistic conventions and seeks to put things "à leur place" so as to decontaminate what he perceives as a piece of *reality*, rescuing it from the alluring "hallucination" that makes a hole ("trouait") in the painting and that allows for unconscious desires and idealized fantasies to surface ("un flamboiement de chairs qui n'étaient pas à leur place"). The "grande figure nue" disrupts the prosaicness of the tableau and resists logical interpretation, giving rise to a sensation of awkwardness and inconsistency that, according to Michael Fried, also perturbed Manet's contemporaries ("Manet and his generation" 65).

However, Zola the Naturalist writer does not (entirely) share Pierre's perspective. Although Zola's preparatory notes reveal an incessant concern for the reception of his work, they also prescribe the overt provocation of readers: "Lui [au public] donner toujours, sinon des cauchemars, du moins des livres excessifs qui restent dans sa mémoire" (*Les Manuscrits*, II: 219). By the same token, Claude's painting is *meant* to reproduce the unsettling feeling that Manet's aesthetics evoke. Yet he exacerbates it, in an attempt to both recreate its visual astonishment through literature and to provide a textual alternative to it, a painterly description that reflects Zola's personal aesthetic views. *L'Œuvre* is, therefore, a site of textual experimentation, in which several of

Claude's ekphrastic descriptions of Paris are placed side by side with painterly descriptions of Paris crafted by the narrator.[41] The descriptions of the Quai de Bourbon, on the Île Saint-Louis, where Claude has his first studio (ch.1); the sunny afternoon on the Champs Elysées after the scandal at the *Salon des Refusés* (ch. 5); Bennecourt, an oasis of green on the outskirts of Paris (ch. 6); the city by night, lit by the street lamps (ch. 7); Paris bustling with life (ch. 8); the relentless descriptions of the Île de la Cité and its inhabitants (ch. 4, 8, 9, 10, 11); and the final scene in the cemetery of Saint-Ouen (ch. 12); all these literary *tableaux* piece together literature and art criticism in a type of painterly writing that is reminiscent of what Bourdieu calls in his analysis of symbolic capital the carefully formulated "désinvolture" and "indifférence aux convenances" that the Goncourts deploy in their *écriture artiste* (*La Distinction* 294). The common tropes of the Goncourtian and Zolian aesthetic paradigm are pertinently summarized by the authorial agent in *L'Œuvre*: "des œuvres d'une notation si personnelle, où pour la première fois la nature baignait dans de la vraie lumière, sous le jeu des reflets et la continuelle décomposition des couleurs" (428). In their artistic endeavors as trendsetters, the Goncourt brothers and Zola endorse, through their literature and their art criticism, originality, unconventionality ("une notation … personnelle"), and the use of natural light

[41] In *Manet's Modernism,* Fried analyzes a significant episode in *L'Œuvre* where Claude's ekphrasis is recomposed by the text (249). Claude, who attends the Salon, visually confronts the bourgeois public, who had mocked his *Plein air* painting a few years earlier at the Salon des Refusés, and who is, at present, in awe before an insipid version of his composition, entitled *Un Déjeuner*, produced by the mediocre Fagerolles. Fried interprets this painterly description of this ignorant public, perceived through the eyes of Claude, as a textual recreation "in terms of pure facingness" of the vanguard artist's painting entitled *Plein air,* a canvas that "eliminates all direct confrontation between painting and viewer" (249).

("la vraie lumière") and vivid colors in the portrayal of contemporary life.[42]

My aim, here, is not to analyze the relationship between Zola's descriptions of Paris and the Seine and Impressionist aesthetics.[43] Instead, I have proposed to decode the parallel series of *tableaux,* constituted by painterly descriptions and ekphrasis in *L'Œuvre,* as instances in which the seemingly positivist logic of the text is destabilized by a "gangrène romantique" (120). In the Zolian paradigm, this "gangrène romantique" (120) corresponds to a penchant for the imagination, lyricism, and idealization. In a 1902 interview with the very solemn title "Émile Zola témoin de la vérité," the writer acknowledges the prolific interconnection of painting and writing occurring in his works: "Dans tous mes livres…j'ai été en contact et échange avec les peintres. ... Les peintres m'ont aidé à peindre d'une manière neuve, 'littérairement.'"[44] In *L'Œuvre*, Claude's ekphrastic portrayals alternate with painterly descriptions, formulated through this new technique of painting with words, inspired by the visual arts. Their abundance within the text is a direct reflection of Zola's desire to look at and to contemplate Paris, to capture the city's modernity and reproduce it, and to give it consistency, "[la] faire vivre" (*Œ* 163).[45]

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[42] Regarding the Goncourt brothers' rapport with Impressionism, and their role as literary precursors of this movement, see Enzo Caramaschi, *Réalisme et impressionnisme dans l'oeuvre des frères Goncourt,* Chapter IV, "Réel et fantastique," pp. 69-88.

[43] Critics, amongst them Robert Niess, Robert Lethbridge, William Berg, Kermit Champa, Eva Forsberg-Rider, and Gaël Bellalou, to name a few, have already provided insight into this topic.

[44] Cited by Robert Lethbridge, "Zola and Contemporary Painting," *The Cambridge Companion to Zola* p. 67.

[45] As I have previously noted, Henri Mitterand remarks that the descriptions of Paris and the Seine from Zola's novels attest to the writer's propensity for idealization of the landscape (Mitterand, "Le Regard d'Émile Zola" 74).

Yet the views of the city in the text are multiple, and the authorial agent proposes an array of descriptive *tableaux* of Paris, each very distinct from the previous ones, while Claude, the painter-character, is expected to translate, in one canvas, ("accoucher" 443) this all-encompassing, ubiquitous image. On a meta-textual level, the authorial agent, a textual persona of the writer-scientist, is driven by what Max Milner calls, referring to Lacan's concept of the gaze, an "illusion d'une maîtrise sur le monde visible" ("L'Écrivain et le desir de voir" 16). Influenced by Lacan's theory, Milner concludes that the human desire to see, and by extension the writer's compulsion to see, is not triggered by external reality but by an unconscious drive ("une configuration inconsciente"), a drive that exists *a priori* to the visible manifestation of the object of the gaze ("préexiste … à toute manifestation visible") (16). Without going further into Lacanian psychoanalysis, this notion of "configuration inconsciente" elucidates Claude's final canvas of Paris. It is this projection of subjective fantasies, superimposed on reality that accounts for the appeal of the "grande figure nue" for Claude, who painted this image, for the authorial agent. The allegorical figure's "fausseté étrange et déconcertante, au milieu des réalités voisines" (546) juxtaposes falsity and reality in the ekphrasis and in the text, yet in so doing, it fails to annihilate the former, since the human ability to see and to observe visible reality is not governed by conscious thought, but by unconscious drives ("configuration inconsciente") that tend to displace reality.

In *Manette Salomon* the Goncourt brothers orchestrate an equally puzzling dialectic between artistic license and scientific rigor, which concentrates attention on the difficulty to harmonize this relationship. At one point in the adventurous career of the bohemian painter Anatole, he is employed by Mr. Bernardin, a renowned Parisian

embalmer. The scientist works for the anatomy museum Orfila, and, in the novel he is presented as the rival of the chemist Jean Nicolas Gannal (1791-1852). This peculiar coupling of a fictional scientist, Mr. Bernardin, and a real scientist Mr. Gannal, is not meant, however, to provide authenticity and reliability to the fictional scientist, but rather, to discredit both. This anticipates Proust's use of a real and fictional scientist in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The Goncourts's subtle sneer at Positivism is expressed by their ironical comment that Mr. Bernardin could have been just as famous as Mr. Gannal, had he frequented refined, *mondain* circles and embalmed famous people ("auquel n'avait guère manqué jusque-là, pour devenir célèbre que la chance d'embaumer des homes connus") (*Manette Salomon* 108). Anatole is hired to paint the dead bodies of M. Bernardin's clients in order to give them a natural aspect:

> Il [M. Bernardin] était parvenu à conserver le poids et le volume de la nature à ses préparations, seulement il ne pouvait les empêcher de prendre, avec le temps, une couleur de momification qui détruisait toute illusion. Il proposa à Anatole de les peindre d'après les modèles qu'il lui fournirait. (108)

The Goncourts conceive Mr. Bernardin as the epitome of the positivist scientist of the 1850s, a pioneer in this burgeoning field who observes nature, emits theories, and carries out different experiments in order to recreate "la nature" in his "preparations." However, when the overall effect, or the "illusion" of life, is disrupted ("détrui[te]"), Mr. Bernardin reverts to art and artifice in his quest for creating verisimilitude. The embalmer's knowledge is limited to mimicking the "poids" and the "volume" of nature, and therefore he needs the artist's skill in order to make this "illusion" of life complete. The height of

Mr. Bernardin's career, his "chef d'œuvre" or his "coup de maître," is to reconstruct for the police and exhibit in view of identification, the severed and severely damaged body of a woman ("une femme coupée en morceaux") (110). The impromptu forensic consultant hires Anatole to apply a natural tint ("couleur chair") to this amorphous mass that would hide the telltale signs of degradation, and provide the semblance of life, the perfect artifice (109).

Coming back to a point I made earlier, the Goncourts had come to realize as early as 1860, while drafting the preparatory notes for *Sœur Philomène,* that abiding by the scientific method had its advantages, the most obvious of which was being recognized as a vanguard artist. However, the disadvantages of adhering to this method included restricting the role of the imagination and invention so as to emulate reality with a false sense of objectivity and rigorousness.[46] Robert Ricatte indicates that the Goncourts "inventent selon des formes qui leur paraissent scientifiques" (190), which explains why M. Bernardin and Anatole's joint endeavor is plausible within the internal logic of the text. This unexpected collaboration of science and art both sustains the Zolian conflation of the 'médecin' with the artist from the *Roman Expérimental*, and parodies it, by oversimplifying its consequences within the plot. M. Bernardin and the painter Anatole exhibit common interests: the former fosters the passion of an artist pursuing his

[46] In *La Création chez les Goncourt*, Robert Ricattte makes the point that Edmond and Jules' novel *Sœur Philomène* is a pseudo-scientific and pseudo-positivist novel. "On ne se méprendra pas," writes Ricatte, "à cette idée d'expérience. On sait à quelle impasse de la logique elle a mené Zola dans le *Roman expérimental*. Elle ne saurait définir une méthode de recherche ; elle provoque seulement ici l'allure du roman, un certain dépouillement du contexte vivant ; elle fait marcher devant nous une âme pas à pas. … Ils ont pu seulement expérimenter sur eux-mêmes les premiers contacts qu'ils prêtent à Philomène avec l'hôpital, et nous avons vu que l'analyse gagna à cette épreuve où ils se sont soumis, d'être originale et convaincante. Mais pour le reste, ils inventent ; seulement ils inventent selon des formes qui leur paraissent scientifiques" (189-190).

masterpiece, his "chef d'oeuvre" (110), while the latter displays the application and the curiosity of a scientist who observes nature and reproduces it perfectly through a very accurate combination of colors. Their collaboration is functional insofar as both scientist and artist create a chimeric entity that is neither completely authentic nor entirely fictitious. This hybrid construction sustains the "illusion" that there *is* an essence of truth and reality, which can be rendered through the work of art.

Nevertheless, this "illusion" is hastily dispensed with when its practical role is subverted by the plot. The reader expects that once the woman's identity is revealed, the heinous murderer will be brought to justice and the reason for the crime will be understood. However, the Goncourts refuse to use scientific logic in the service of morality and social propriety. The authorial agents refrain from providing further information as to the outcome of Anatole's forensic experience. This, in turn, means that science is no longer the path to progress and socio-political improvement, but an aesthetic exercise whose ultimate goal is to embellish a dead body and astonish the spectators of this artifice. *Manette Salomon* subverts the hermeneutic code, since the enigma of the severed body is articulated in an anecdotal fashion, and since the text invites the reader to reach personal conclusions about the social utility of the scientific method.[47] M. Bernardin is not a "maître des phénomènes," as Zola theorizes in *Le Roman expérimental,* and his interest in the progress of humanity is limited to his obsession with recreating illusions of likeness (330).

I want to insist on the Goncourt brothers' unorthodox metaphor of the

[47] In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes defines the hermeneutic code as "l'ensemble des unités qui ont pour fonction d'articuler de diverses manières, une question, sa réponse et les accidents variés qui peuvent ou préparer la question ou retarder la réponse; ou encore de formuler une énigme et d'amener son déchiffrement" (566).

fragmented, dismembered body, this "corps coupé en morceaux" and pieced together through a consensus of art and science so as to create an artifice of resemblance. I consider it an accurate and emblematic trope for *L'Œuvre* and, by extension, for the Zolian stylistics (preceding the Dreyfus affair and the emergence of the "troisième Zola").[48] By this I mean that Zola's fiction is evocative of the Naturalist "préparations," which provide a strong, solid image of human nature, the "poids" and "volume de la nature." However, in order to become a masterpiece that appeals to the public, this fiction needs the spark of imagination that embellishes the "préparations" in a "couleur chair," keeping the "illusion" alive (*Manette Salomon* 108).[49]

To restate my claim from the beginning of the chapter, I suggest that *L'Œuvre* is a textual body made up of dissimilar pieces ("morceaux") of positivist theories and lyrical embellishments that are stitched together in order to give the impression of a seamless whole. Rather than being a model of "unified totality" (38) and the expression of positivist thought as Carol Armstrong argues in *Manet Manette*, *L'Œuvre* is a composite text that brings together, somewhat disharmoniously, disparate elements. It intermingles fiction writing with different genres such as art criticism, theory of the novel, scientific treatise, social history, and popular melodrama (the first encounter of Claude and Christine). It also superposes writing with visual arts, and the encounter of these different artistic media complicates the readability of the text. Most importantly, *L'Œuvre* is the

[48] Regarding the "troisième Zola," see Mitterand's "Seul et debout" in *Zola, Cahier de l'exposition* 13.

[49] In *Manet Manette*, Carol Armstrong has provided a very convincing analysis of the heterogeneous and dialogic nature of *Manette Salomon*, which she describes as a "rambling, chatty story" (54) that underscores the "versatility" of its main female character and, in so doing, "propos[es] a radically decentered image" (51).

novel in which the fractures inherent to Zola's theory of Naturalism are most apparent. These inconsistencies and the disparities originate from a constant wavering between a lyrical tendency, dictated by the "tempérament," and a self-imposed scientific matrix.

In this chapter on Zola's novel about the world of the avant-garde artists of the 1860s I have argued that the writer wants to demonstrate his talent as a creator. This is supported by Zola's statement that vanguard painters have inspired him to elaborate a new textual stylistics and to produce literary paintings ("peindre d'une manière neuve, 'littérairement'"), which could be interpreted as a definition of his personal brand of *écriture artiste*.[50] Nevertheless, Zola also wants to demonstrate that Naturalist aesthetics (represented in *L'Œuvre* in the works of the successful artist Pierre), with its scientific outlook, can lead to social and political improvement by forging citizens able to "reprendr[e] un jour l'Alsace et la Lorraine" (*RE* 370). In the following chapter I will examine the ways in which J.-K. Huysmans unsettles some key principles of Naturalist aesthetics according to a poetics of the arabesque.

[50] Cited by Robert Lethbridge, "Zola and Contemporary Painting," *The Cambridge Companion to Zola* p. 67.

CHAPTER V

THE POETICS OF THE ARABESQUE IN J.-K. HUYSMANS' *A REBOURS* AND ODILON REDON'S CHARCOAL DRAWINGS AND LITHOGRAPHS FROM THE 1870S AND 1880S

In 1884, the critic Émile Hennequin (1859-1888) writes a laudatory article in the *Revue Indépendante* about J.-K. Huysmans' recently published novel *A rebours*. Hennequin is struck by what he describes as the novel's innovative style:

> [Huysmans] avait conçu un type de phrase particulier, où par une accumulation d'incidentes, par un mouvement pour ainsi dire spiraloïde, il est arrivé à enclore et à sentir dans une période, toute la complexité d'une vision, à grouper toutes les parties d'un tableau autour de son expression d'ensemble, à rendre une sensation dans son intégrité et dans la subordination de ses parties. (*Revue Indépendante* I, 208; qtd. Issacharoff 73-74)

Hennequin, a close friend of Huysmans and an unwavering supporter of the painter Odilon Redon, was familiar with both of their theories on art and literature, and provides a quite relevant analysis of *A rebours*, one that synthesizes a key feature of Huysmansian aesthetics: the arabesque. According to Hennequin, Huysmans has a propensity to cultivate intricate and ambiguous visions in his work, by means of a "movement spiraloïde" that in turn expresses "une sensation dans son intégrité et dans la subordination de ses parties." This interpretation could also apply to the style of a number of Redon's *noirs*, his dark pictures from the 1870s and 1880s.

In Redon's biographical essay *Confidences d'artiste* (1909), later published posthumously in his journal *A soi-même* (written between 1867-1915), the painter argues for a poetics of the arabesque as an overarching theme of his visual imagery. The artist, who in the 1890s decides to gain a wider audience by detaching himself from the "decadent" label that Huysmans' famous novel *A rebours* has imposed on him, takes it upon himself to write a detailed account of the affective engagement that he seeks to establish with the public through his artworks.[1] Redon explains that the mechanism of meaning-making at the core of his "art suggestif" relies on two major factors: the ambiguity of the images he creates and the spectator's capacity for imagination (*A soi-même* 25). He affirms that his images are:

> … sans autre explication qui ne se peut guère plus précise, la répercussion d'une expression humaine, placée, par fantaisie permise, dans un jeu d'arabesques, où, je crois bien, l'action qui en dérivera dans l'esprit du spectateur l'incitera à des fictions dont les significations seront grandes ou petites, selon sa sensibilité et selon son aptitude imaginative à tout agrandir ou rapetisser. (*A soi-même* 27)

Redon emphasizes the notion that his sketches, lithographs, and watercolors are meant to be vague, so as to incite an interplay of "arabesques" that are brought into existence due to the imaginative resources of the spectator.

When we consider Redon's "arabesque" lines in conjunction with the passage from Hennequin's review of *A rebours,* we can see that these lines function similarly to Huysmans' "spiraloïde" phrases. By means of a suggestive use of tonal contrasts between

[1] See Dario Gamboni's article "Odilon Redon et ses critiques: Une lutte pour la production de la valeur," especially pp. 30-31.

light and dark, and through the use of an evocative vocabulary, Redon, as a practitioner and theorist of the visual arts, as well as Huysmans, as a writer and art critic, inscribe in their works the conditions for multiple simultaneous interpretations, ones that require the spectator's active participation in the process of meaning-making.[2] Huysmans' literary description of Redon's *Mélancolie* (1876) in Chapter V of *A rebours,* seen through the eyes of the neurotic aesthete character, the Duke Jean Des Esseintes, is not an objective and mimetic literary depiction of this drawing or its medium (charcoal and gouache, pastel and black chalk on paper). Rather, it is a subjective distortion that reveals the mechanisms through which the spectator's powers of creation are sparked by an evocative type of artistic production, "dont les significations seront grandes ou petites, selon sa sensibilité et selon son aptitude imaginative" (*A soi-même* 27). Dario Gamboni argues that the shifting positions of art critic, creator, onlooker, and character that occur in Redon's works, shifts that I argue, take place in *A rebours* as well, are brought about by the ambiguity and indeterminacy of Redon's "potential images" which compel the spectator to conceive of a work of art as "a process and not as an object" (*Potential Images* 13; 177). I claim, therefore, that Huysmans renders textually Redon's visual effects of ambiguity through arabesque-like, spiraling phrases, which weave together several artistic mediums (literature, visual arts and music), and which draw attention to the collaborative meaning-making process that connects the artist with the reader/onlooker.

[2] Dario Gamboni argues in *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* that artistic modernity lies in the active and subjective role of the onlooker who, when faced with the abstraction of artistic production, is compelled to produced his or her own personal interpretation.

The Arabesque in the Nineteenth Century

Before I go any further in my examination of the similarities between the poetics of Huysmans and Redon, their formal and thematic use of the arabesque, and their contributions to *écriture artiste*, I will take a step back in order to define this concept and explore its contemporary reception. In nineteenth-century discourses, the concept of arabesque can be found in literature, visual art, architecture, archeology, music, dance, and studies on mental illness, and is imbued with a tinge of Orientalism. According to Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* "arabesque" is a far-reaching notion that references an array of discourses and disciplines (540-541). The primary meaning of the adjective is related to Arab culture: "Qui est dans le goût des Arabes, qui est fait à la manière des Arabes, qui leur est propre" (540). Arabesques are defined as imaginative and visually pleasing decorations: "Ornements de sculpture, de peinture et d'architecture, à la mode chez les Arabes; ils [the decorations] sont formés de feuillages et de fruits, de draperies et de rubans, etc., contrastés, groupés ou enlacés avec art, de manière à produire un effet agréable" (540).

The Larousse article also shows that during the nineteenth century, it became generally accepted that arabesques, as "ornements traités avec la plus gracieuse fantaisie" (*Larousse* 540), were expressions of the creative imagination. This belief led to the figurative meaning of arabesque, as an innovative, whimsical, and fanciful literary style of writing. This signification resonates with Edgar Allan Poe's use of the term in his collection of short stories *Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). The adjective "arabesque" also appears in Poe's essay on interior design, "The Philosophy of

Furniture" (1840). Poe criticizes the uniformity of "straight lines" in American interior design, which he deems inartistic, and proposes arabesque patterns as prevalent, non-figurative decorative motifs that, unlike "the abomination of flowers, or representations of well-known objects on any kind," are able to generate spontaneous images that entertain the onlooker (*The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* 463).

In nineteenth-century literary criticism, "arabesque" had a fluid definition, and was used in both a complimentary and a pejorative sense (*Larousse* 540). For instance, Alexandre Dumas used the expression "broder leur avenir de ces folles et brillantes arabesques" to suggest fanciful dreams and aspirations (*Larousse* 540). Conversely, the French philosopher Victor Cousin utilized the adjective in a derogatory manner to criticize a type of pompous discourse that lacked logical fundaments: "On n'entend que le bruit sourd et confus de la dialectique péripatéticienne, dégradée par les petites inventions du bel esprit arabesque…" (*Larousse* 540). In Baudelaire's *Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs*, the arabesque style manifests itself through "la ligne courbe" as an effective critical device (*L'Esprit public*, April 15, 1846). "Il y a deux méthodes d'éreintage," notes Baudelaire, "par la ligne courbe, et par la ligne droite qui est le plus court chemin" (*L'Esprit public*, April 15, 1846). The arabesque "ligne courbe" of criticism allows for an indirect, and thus morally reprehensible, attack against the work of an artist. Its effect, according to Baudelaire is to "amuse" the public, rather than to provide a pertinent analysis of the work (*L'Esprit public*, April 15, 1846).[3]

[3] For an analysis of Baudelaire's journalistic criticism and the concept of "éreintage" see Antoine Compagnon's Course at the College de France, *De la littérature comme sport de combat,* delivered on January 31, 2017. For a discussion of Baudelaire's arabesque poetics, see Barbara H. Kremen's article " Baudelaire's Spiritual Arabesque."

The "arabesque" as musical genre in the nineteenth century finds its most prominent representations in Schumann's *Arabeske* Op. 18 (1838) and Claude Debussy's (1862-1918) *Deux arabesques* (1888-1891), which the latter composer accompanied with two theoretical articles examining the devices of musical arabesques: "Musique: Vendredi Saint," in *La Revue blanche*, May 1, 1901; and "L'Orientation musicale," in *Musica*, October 1902. In his *Deux arabesques* Debussy used dissonant tonalities and irregular rhythmic patterns, whose innovative sound struck the Parisian music scene at the end of the 1880s.[4] In fact, Huysmans mentions Schumann's violoncello compositions in Chapter XV of *A rebours*, and concentrates at length on their troubling reverberations on Des Esseintes' fragile nervous system. Gurminder Kaur Bhogal argues that Debussy's *Deux arabesques* combine musical and visual aspects "to create concepts of 'melodic line,' 'melodic curve,' 'supple melody,' and 'decorative melody' as they emerge in the new structure of Arabesque Melody" (176).

In the domain of dance, the Larousse Dictionary defines "arabesque" as a sequence of dance movements "représentant des sujets qui se trouvent sur des vases antiques" (540). The Italian choreographer Carlo Blasis' *Traité élémentaire théorique* (1820) marks the shift from the "arabesque" as "groups… de danseurs et de danseuses, s'entrelaçant de mille manières" (25) to the contemporary understanding of the term as a balancing attitude of a single dancer, which requires the dancer to maintain an equilibrium between the working leg and the extended arm.[5]

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[4] For more on the development of the arabesque motif in nineteenth-century musical compositions, see Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, "Debussy's Arabesque and Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé (1912)."

[5] For an analysis of the development of arabesque in dance, see, among others, Francesca Falcone's 1999 article "The evolution of the arabesque in dance," pp.71-117.

Curvilinear, arabesque lines were also used as schematic representations that accompanied scientific treatises. For instance, the pictorial *tracés* that accompanied Doctor Jean-Martin Charcot's (1825-1893) study on mental disturbances, *Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux*, constitute one of the most prominent examples in this sense. These diagrams, covered in arabesque lines, acquired the status of an empirical document that examined the yawning patterns of a female patient diagnosed with hysteria.

Modern scholarship on the literary arabesque is still in its incipient phase. One detailed study on the literary arabesque is Bernard Vouilloux's *Écritures de fantaisie: Grotesques, arabesques, zigzags et serpentins,* which establishes a typology of what he terms "écriture de fantaisie." He defines this fantasy writing as "un style de composition libre," "digressif," "rhapsodique" (12), abounding with incidental phrases and following an ambulatory structure (16). Vouilloux's study subsequently traces the usages of fantasy in nineteenth-century discourses with an interest in "la materialité du signe à travers l'oralité" (20). This extended conceptualization of the "écriture de fantaisie" genre allows Vouilloux to establish analogies between the poetics of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760-7), Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, Marivaux's *Le Spectateur français*, Nodier's eccentric *contes fantastiques,* Baudelaire's "déambulations de la prose au rythme des déambulations urbaines" (16), and Mallarmé's graphic experiments in the poem *Un Coup de dés,* in which words resemble musical notes on a partition (173). However, Vouilloux's study treats interchangeably the notions of "grotesque," arabesque," "zigzag," and "serpentin," describing them as traits of

fantasy writing, without providing an in-depth analysis of the literary arabesque in its connection to nineteenth-century scientific discourses on cognitive theory.[6]

As this brief overview shows, throughout the nineteenth century, the notion of the arabesque was present in the collective imagination, eliciting a wide range of critical reflections in a variety of separate domains. This wide dissemination resulted in the polysemy of the term, and rendered its reference to Arab culture tangential. Nevertheless, the anti-canonical and anti-academic tendencies exhibited and theorized by artists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which I have discussed at length in Chapter II in reference to the stylistics of the Goncourt brothers and Delacroix, are still present at the end of that century. By this I mean that the arabesque, due to its Middle Eastern, therefore "Oriental" origins, was viewed as an alternative to the academically imposed Greek and Roman sources of inspiration, and thus was associated with the aesthetic experimentations of avant-garde artists. For the purposes of this analysis I retain a succinct number of significations of the adjective arabesque. I am especially interested in the irregular, curvilinear shape of this decorative motif, which requires the dynamic participation of the spectator in conferring on it a sense. Another attribute that I use in my analysis is the arbitrary nature of this pattern, which causes it to encompass multiple meanings. This is consistent with Dario Gamboni's notion of "potential images" that exist in virtue of the "active, subjective nature of seeing" (*Potential Images* 18).

The irregular plot structure of *A rebours* has led some critics, including Laurence Porter, to classify the novel as a distorted version of a picaresque novel, "one that ends in

[6] As Jonathan Crary explains in *Techniques of the Observer,* the development of nineteenth-century art has been determined by "the elaboration of new empirical knowledge of vision and techniques of the visible" (5).

the protagonist's degeneration instead of success" ("Decadence and the fin-de-siècle novel" 94). Ruth Weinreb, in her structural analysis of *A rebours*, argues that Huysmans used direct discourse, a 'neutral' subject, the present tense, and adverbs as narrative devices that "control the quality of Des Esseintes' presence" in the novel (225). Alain Pagès proposes a reading of the intricate style of *A rebours* as a manifestation of the Goncourtian *écriture artiste* in "*A rebours* et l'écriture artiste," which he however reduces to "écriture impressionniste" (37). Pagès argues that like the artistic techniques of the Impressionist painters, Huysmans' writing strategies capture the effects of changing natural light at different moments of the day and during different seasons. Scholars have also examined at length the visual nature of the novel *A rebours*, yet they have mostly concentrated their examinations on the affinities between Huysmans, Gustave Moreau, and the Symbolist movement.[7] In *Salome and the Dance of Writing*, Françoise Meltzer contends that Moreau's portrait of Salome from *A rebours* rejects "all synthesis" and represents "a radical otherness" in the text (46). Pamela Genova proposes a unique interpretation of the novel. She investigates the notions of fragmentation, ornamentation, and artificiality as traits of *A rebours* inspired by *Japonisme* stylistics.

In comparison, scholarship on Odilon Redon has analyzed the literary sources of inspiration for the painter and his interpretation of the universe, namely, Baudelaire, Poe, Flaubert, Huysmans, and Mallarmé.[8] Commentators have also investigated the thematic

[7] On the exchanges between Huysmans's *A rebours* and Symbolist aesthetics, see also Helen Borowitz's "Visions of Salome" and William Berg's "Salome's Dance: Flaubert, Moreau, and Huysmans," especially pp. 160- 165, in *Imagery and Ideology*.

[8] See, among others, Gamboni's *The Brush and the Pen;* Alexandra Strauss' *Baudelaire, Poe, Mallarmé, Flaubert: Interpretations par Odilon Redon;* André Mellerio's *Odilon Redon;* and Roseline Bacou's *Odilon Redon*.

similarities and parallelism between the strange, oneiric universe of Redon's dark pictures (*noirs*), populated by eerie figures, and the monstrous hallucinations of Des Esseintes, the mentally ill aristocrat in *A rebours*. Nicolas Valazza, for example, explores the trope of the monster framed by fin-de-siècle anxieties about syphilis in Redon's dark drawings, as mentioned in *A rebours* (243-244). Barbara Larson studies the cultural context in which Redon published his dark drawings, and argues that the painter's bizarre visual universe was influenced by Pasteur's theories on the microbial world.

While these thematic and stylistic analyses are very compelling, allying with critics such as Porter, I propose to expand the discussion of *A rebours* beyond the overused framework of "decadence," which has stuck with the novel since it publication, and beyond the somewhat restrictive approach of a strictly structuralist analysis.[9] In this chapter I use the visual metaphor of the arabesque pattern as a framework for understanding the richness and complexity of this asymmetrical, and fluctuating, narrative, which follows the rich inner world of a neurotic aesthete. The aim of this chapter is to analyze a set of themes and techniques shared by Huysmans and Redon, and to examine how their artistic conceptions, expressed in *A rebours* and in the painter's charcoal, ink, and pencil drawings from the 1870s and 1880s, known as *noirs* (which differ from his colorful works of the 1890s), provide insight into the shifting contours of *écriture artiste* in the fin-de-siècle period. Therefore, my analysis constitutes an alternative examination of the Huysmans and Redon grouping, one that takes as starting point the theoretical model proposed by Dario Gamboni in *Potential Images,* his study on

[9] Porter argues in "Decadence and the fin-de-siècle novel" that "good recent Huysmans critics usually avoid applying the term 'decadent' to him because his devout Catholic writing superseded his decadent phase and lasted twice as long" (95).

the use of virtuality and ambiguity in avant-garde art. I then transpose Gamboni's conclusions to my own analysis of the poetics of the arabesque in *A rebours*.

In *Potential Images*, Dario Gamboni investigates the techniques used by visual artists in the period between 1880-1914. He contends that their innovative conceptualizations of representation and spectatorship were brought about by new social and scientific configurations. He concludes that "potential images are those that depend on the onlooker's state of mind" and that "come fully into being, in conformity with the artists' intentions, only through the mental participation of the onlooker" (*Potential Images* 9). Redon's visual work, according to Gamboni, "belongs both to the perceived object and to the perceiving mind, and maintains itself on the fringes of both" (*Potential Images* 77). Building on Gamboni's theory, my main claim in this chapter, as suggested earlier, in addition to the fact that the arabesque is what demands reader participation, is that Huysmans translates Redon's pictorial practices of calling attention to the perceived object and to the process of the perceiving mind by inscribing within the novel "successive layers of interpretation," and by referencing multiple mediums (visual art, music and literature) that intertwine in an arabesque-like construct (*Potential Images* 13; 82).

Of course, this is not to say that I treat the productions of Huysmans and Redon as non-representational. While Huysmans and Redon push the boundaries of representational logic, they never relinquish it completely. That is because in the 1880s up to 1914, "representation and the various forms it takes are questioned and challenged but without representation being completely abandoned or rejected" (*Potential Images* 9). To support my main claim, I first advance the idea that in *A rebours,* and in Redon's dark

pictures, the visual and the literary are organically interconnected through a complex scheme of analogies, which reproduce the meanderings of arabesque patterns, thus giving rise to synesthetic effects. Going beyond the restraints of their respective mediums, Redon and Huysmans, as Hennquin affirmed, "group[ent] toutes les parties d'un tableau autour de son vision d'ensemble," the unified vision being an artwork in which literature, visual art, and music converge in the project of complex representation (*Revue indépendante* I, 208; qtd. Issacharoff 73-74).

My second supporting argument is that the narrative of *A rebours* and the facture of Redon's dark drawings and lithographs from the 1870s and 1880s mirror an irregular, arabesque-like structure by reproducing, both textually and visually, the non-normative sensory perceptions of a mind affected by mental disturbances. By this I mean a mind whose distorted sensory perception follows an irregular logic, and thus can no longer be expected to reproduce an objective account of external reality. This argument is supported by Zola's critique of *A rebours* and his disapproval of the plot's *incoherence*, which allows the protagonist to be "aussi fou au commencement qu'à la fin" (*Lettres inédites à Emile Zola* 106). The difference of opinion between the two writers is determined by Huysmans' view, expressed in his 1903 preface to *A rebours*, that the formulaic, materialist-oriented precepts of Naturalist fiction compel one to reproduce ad infinitum the same type of plot ("rôder par de voies plus ou moins explorées") (*A rebours* 56). Huysmans therefore exhibits his originality by using Naturalist formulas differently, so as to reproduce the irregular, spontaneous, and subjective logic of neurosis. It becomes clear that for Huysmans and Redon, mimetic, "logical" representation no longer guarantees the quality of artistic productions. Similarly to the couplings of writers and

painters investigated in previous chapters in connection to *écriture artiste,* namely the Goncourts and Delacroix, Flaubert and Moreau, and Zola and Manet, Huysmans and Redon take strong stances against the art of the official Salon. In this case, the writer and the painter criticize the overuse of hackneyed formulas by representatives of state-sanctioned art. In his review of the *Exposition des Indépendants*, for instance, Huysmans restates Baudelaire's argument from the essay *Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), according to which modern art needs to deal with contemporary subject matter and to do away with the "tricheries académiques": "…car l'on persiste à emprisonner des gens dans des salles, à leur débiter les mêmes sornettes sur l'art, à leur faire copier l'antique, et on ne leur dit pas que la beauté n'est point uniforme et invariable, qu'elle change, suivant la climature, suivant le siècle… " (*L'Art moderne* 265). In fact, in his review of the 1879 Salon, Huysmans, who was aspiring to acquire literary renown, eagerly connects his name to that of Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, and Zola, acknowledging them as his intellectual mentors: "J'ai souvent pensé avec étonnement à la trouée que les impressionnistes et que Flaubert, de Goncourt et Zola ont faite dans l'art. L'école naturaliste a été révélée au public par eux ; l'art a été bouleversé du haut en bas, affranchi du ligotage official des écoles" (*L'Art moderne* 89). Redon occupied an analogous position, expressed in his rebuke of the state-sanctioned art of Ingres: "Ingres est un disciple honnête et servant des maîtres d'un autre âge… Il représentera toujours en France, … la hautaine et fastidieuse patronale incarnation de l'art officiel" (*A soi-même* 146-147).

Yet, what determines the originality of the style of *A rebours* and of Redon's charcoal drawings from the 1870s and 1880s, clearly marking an expansion of *écriture*

artiste towards a stylistics that forges the path to the daring artistic experiments of the twentieth century, is the way in which the artwork opens itself up to interpretation, by exposing the process of its production, and by modeling mental strategies of interpreting ambiguous, subjective artworks. In a letter from October 30, 1864 to Henri Cazalis about the poem *Hérodiade*, Mallarmé theorizes a type of art that would no longer render "la chose" but its effect on the spectator, "l'effet qu'elle produit" (*Correspondance* 206). Huysmans and Redon, cogenerationists and close friends of the poet, who attended his *Mardis* artistic cenacle, seek to render in their works "la chose," in connection to "l'effet qu'elle produit," according to a brand of logic that allows for hallucination and subjective distortions.[10]

As I have shown in Chapter IV of this study, Zola examines mental illness and hereditary determinism, following a scientific paradigm, in *Le Roman expérimental*. If Zola subverts the rigidity of the positivist paradigm by inserting lyrical passages, meant to be a statement for the writer's creative freedom, his ultimate goal is to follow a cause and effect paradigm in order to account for the manifestation of these ailments, and to subsequently find effective cures. Zola stands behind the ideology of medical, social, and economic progress as a way to improve the lives of the French people, especially after France's loss of the Franco-Prussian war. Huysmans and Redon, on the other hand, unsettle the paradigm of cause and effect, and instead focus their poetics on the creative potential of sensory distortions and the subjective, ambiguous artistic universe that arises, adding a new dimension to *écriture artiste*.

[10] Anthony Glinoer and Vincent Laisney provide a thoroughly documented account of Parisian cenacles of the nineteenth century in *L'âge des cénacles: confraternités littéraires et artistiques au XIXe siècle.*

The Interlacing of Art, Literature, and Music

In *A rebours*, as well as in his art criticism *L'Art moderne* (1883) and *Certains* (1889), Huysmans focuses his attention on the visual productions of Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, as examples of mutually beneficial exchanges between artworks that belong to different mediums. Redon's sketches, affirms the narrator in *A rebours*, "sautaient, pour la plupart, par-dessus les bornes de la peinture" (154). As a novelist and an art critic, Huysmans admires the capacity of these painters to integrate literary motifs into their paintings, while maintaining the autonomy and originality of the finite product in the realm of visual art. Huysmans shares similar artistic convictions with Redon and Moreau, insofar as he seeks to forge his personal and original literary style while theorizing on, and subsequently incorporating, techniques from painting and music. The creator of *A rebours*, like the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, and Zola, engages in detailed considerations of the strengths and limitations of the literary code, in his novels, art criticism, and correspondence.

In his review of the *Exposition des Indépendants* (1880), for example, Huysmans uses analogies between literature and the visual arts in order to depict Degas's painterly techniques:

> Jules et Edmond de Goncourt ont dû forger un incisif et puissant outil, créer une palette neuve des tons, un vocabulaire original, une nouvelle langue; de même, pour exprimer la vision des êtres et des choses dans l'atmosphère qui leur est propre… M. Degas a dû… emprunter à tous les vocabulaires de la peinture, combiner les divers éléments de l'essence et

> de l'huile, de l'aquarelle et du pastel, de la détrempe et de la gouache, forger des néologismes de couleurs, briser "l'ordonnance" acceptée des sujets. (*L'Art moderne* 132-33)

As this passage demonstrates, Huysmans shifts with effortless ease between the specialized language of literature and idioms from the visual arts. Moreover, in order to characterize the underlying techniques that the novelists and the painter utilize, the art critic continuously mixes specialized notions that apply to the literary domain, such as "vocabulaire" and "néologisme," with painting techniques, such as "palette," "tons," and "l'huile, de l'aquarelle et du pastel, de la détrempe et de la gouache." This arabesque-like fusion of the literary and visual medium allows for the Goncourts to be depicted as painters who employ a novel tonal palette, while Degas is presented as a literary craftsman who experiments with color neologisms ("néologismes de couleurs"). Beyond the pedantic quality of this technique, which is meant to substantiate Huysmans' theoretical expertise, this practice of interlacing the literary and the visual in hybrid constructs is a key feature of the style of *A rebours*.

In Chapter XIV of the novel, Huysmans uses multiple metaphors from the domain of visual arts to characterize the craft of writing. When analyzing the works of Gautier, the authorial voice remarks that Des Esseintes' "admiration pour l'incomparable peintre qu'était cet homme, était allée en se dissolvant de jours en jours, et maintenant il demeurait plus étonné que ravi, par ses descriptions en quelque sorte indifférentes" (*A rebours* 308). Huysmans reuses in his novel the same strategy as in *L'Art moderne*, which consists of interlacing vocabulary from different fields in order to characterize the work of an artist. In this particular example, Huysmans first designates Théophile Gautier as an

"incomparable peintre," only to later critique Gautier's apparently hackneyed literary descriptions. This approach was meant to convey Huysmans' critical expertise and his authoritative dexterity in writing theoretical discourse. Huysmans' marketing ploy was driven by both aesthetic and economic concerns, since he was active as a writer and an art critic at a time when the dealer-critic system flourished, and when reviews could make or break the career of aspiring painters, sculptures, musicians, and artists in general.[11] Another illustrative example is Huysmans' analysis of the distinctive features of Edmond de Goncourt's novel *La Faustin*: "un style perspicace et morbide, nerveux et retors, diligent à noter l'impalpable impression qui frappe les sens et détermine la sensation" (*A rebours* 299). This metaphor echoes Edmond's praise of Huysmans' writing strategies in the novel *Marthe*, formulated by a writer endowed with "des rares qualités de styliste et de coloriste" (*Lettres à E. de Goncourt* 49).

Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* are also indelibly present in *A rebours*, as many of Huysmans' contemporaries remarked when the novel first came out.[12] Indeed, Baudelaire's theories of correspondences represent the main stylistic thread in the novel, inasmuch as the visual and the musical works do not interrupt the narrative flow, but rather enrich it, in an interplay of equivalences. Huysmans openly states his sources and his literary allegiances in Chapters XII and XIV of *A rebours*, which are dedicated to

[11] See *The Brush and the Pen* p. 57. See also Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White's influential study on the dealer-critic system, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*.

[12] Huysmans' contemporaries who reviewed *A rebours* and commented on the presence of the poet in the novel include Barbey d'Aurevilly in *Le Constitutionnel* July 28, 1884; Th. de Banville in *Gil Blas*, June 1884; Léo Trezenik in *Lutèce*, June 1, 1884; Edouard Drumond in *Le Livre*, June 1884; and Joséphin Péladan in *La Revue des Livres et des Estampes*, October 1, 1884. For a more detailed account see Issacharoff p. 71.

Esseintes' book collections.[13] While the writers that he admired are extensive, including such resonant names as Balzac, Edmond de Goncourt, Zola, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Poe, and Dickens, it is Baudelaire who most dominates the fictional universe of the novel. Moreau's painting of Salome, for example, seen through the eyes of des Esseintes, embodies a type of art that "franchissait les limites de la peinture, empruntait à l'art d'écrire ses plus subtiles évocations," and as such, has the same impact on the character as "celle de certains poèmes de Baudelaire" (*A Rebours* 149-150). Here we see the trope of one art surpassing the "bornes" and "limites" of another art, which is a recurring motif in *A rebours*. What matters for my research is the common attitude towards the arts of Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Redon, namely, that literature does not compete with the visual arts and music; rather, by modeling for the reader the various ways in which to enjoy effects and sensations bought about by art from different mediums, literature provides a valid model for approaching the visual arts and music. I therefore contend that this brand of artistic fusion inspired by Baudelaire's poetics, which is present in *A rebours* and in some of Redon's drawings and lithographs from the 1870s and 1880s, is a manifestation of the overarching arabesque structure that shapes these works.

Before I go any further in my analysis, I will provide a brief overview of the treatment of medium purity at the turn of the century to show why Huysmans' and Redon's works are innovative. In the fin-de-siècle period, all artists did not support this type of artistic fusion. Gamboni argues that for the avant-garde painters, especially the neo-impressionists, the epithet "literary" acquired negative connotations when applied to

[13] On Baudelaire's influence on *A rebours*, see Robert Baldick, *The Life of J.-K.* Huysmans, pp. 124-5, and for a discussion on the poet as a model for Des Esseintes, see p. 122. See also Henri Scepi's "Chemins de prose: Huysmans et l'écriture déambulatoire" pp. 99-114.

the visual arts because it implied that the artist, rather than creating an original subject, took inspiration from the field of literature (*The Brush and the Pen* 314). In addition, towards the end of his career Redon himself tried to dissociate his charcoal sketches and drawings from "decadent criticism" and *A rebours*. This attitude came about for two reasons. Firstly, the painter's colorful productions of the 1890s no longer reflected Huysmans' decadent aesthetics, which Huysmans himself abandoned in his Catholic phase (*The Brush and the Pen* 69). Secondly, once Redon became an established painter with a flourishing career, he no longer depended on either the publicity of *A rebours* or on the artist-critic symbiosis for the sale of his works.[14]

Nevertheless, as Gamboni points out, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, the notion of "uniting" the arts determined "exchanges between the various disciplines" (*Potential Images* 168). Indeed, a close analysis of Huysmans's *A rebours* and Redon's lithographs reveals the subversion of what Clement Greenberg calls "the limitations of the medium of the specific art," and the incorporation of a hybrid fusion of the arts (32). In his journal *A soi-même*, Redon acknowledges that his aesthetics has been inspired by that of writers, including Baudelaire, Flaubert, Poe, Mallarmé, and Huysmans.[15] In fact, commentators have noted that Redon's first lithographic album *Dans le rêve* (1879) takes

[14] For an in-depth investigation of Redon's complex relations with contemporary critics, see Gamboni's article "Odilon Redon et ses critiques: une lutte pour la production de la valeur," and his work *The Brush and the Pen*, especially Chapter X, "Redon in the Arena of Criticism," pp. 271-300.

[15] Redon mentions in his journal that the botanist Armand Clavaud, his friend and mentor, introduced him to the writings of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Edgar Allan Poe: "Lorsque parurent les premiers livres de Flaubert, il me les désignait déjà avec clairvoyance. Il me fit lire Edgar Poe et Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, à l'heure même de leur apparition" (*A soi-même* 18).

up a great number of Baudelairean themes and motifs.[16] Redon himself cultivates in his journal the self-image of an erudite and refers to his visual productions as fictions, rather than paintings: "J'ai fait des fictions" (*A soi-même* 92).

Redon explains in his famous letter to the art critic André Mellerio, from 1898, that he voluntarily rejects the notion of "illustration" in relation to his sketches and lithographs inspired by the works of Baudelaire, Poe, Mallarmé, and Flaubert: "Je n'ai jamais employé le mot défectueux d''illustration.' Vous ne le trouverez pas dans mes catalogues. C'est un terme à trouver : je ne vois que ceux de transmission, d'interprétation et encore ils ne sont pas exacts pour dire tout à fait, le résultat d'une de mes lectures passant dans mes 'noirs' organisés" (Mellerio 114-115). Alexandra Strauss argues that in Redon's "interprétations" and "transmissions" of the literary medium into the visual medium, the painter discards the hierarchy of the arts by incorporating literature into his original style (*Baudelaire, Poe, Mallarmé, Flaubert: Interprétations par Odilon Redon* 56). For instance, in the album *A Edgar Poe* (1882), which Huysmans mentions in *A rebours*, Redon includes numerous suggestive tropes from Poe's works, while maintaining an atmosphere of ambiguity, conducive to multiple interpretations. Specifically, the artist draws the teeth from the short story *Berenice*, the bell from *The Devil in the Belfry,* the balloon from *the Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall,* the raven from the synonymous prose poems, and the eyes from the prose poem *To Helen*. He also superimposes the proper names of Poe's heroines, such as Lenore, to his emblematic androgynous female figures with simplified profiles (Strauss 56). Redon proposes a similar treatment in the album *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1890) and in the three

[16] Gamboni provides an in-depth analysis of the exchanges between the literary and the visual domains in Chapter IX of *Potential Images*, pp. 168-182.

lithograph albums from 1888, 1889, and 1896 inspired by Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874). Additionally, the album *Songes* (1891), without directly naming a literary source of inspiration, exhibits "une thématique tant baudelairienne que mallarméenne" (Strauss 92).

Returning to Huysmans, the novelist applies in *A rebours* Baudelaire's theory of equivalences from his 1861 essay "Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris." Baudelaire applauds the capacity of Wagner's music to translate, by means of "gradations subtitles," the complexity of human nature (*OC* 2:785). "Il semble parfois, en écoutant cette musique ardente et despotique," notes Baudelaire, "qu'on retrouve peintes sur le fond des ténèbres, déchiré par la rêverie, les vertigineuses conceptions de l'opium" (*OC* 2: 785). Baudelaire brings into play synesthetic effects, transforming the sounds of this "musique ardente et despotique" into vague and obscure visual traces that resemble the hallucinations brought about by the disarrayed senses of an opium user. The poet then moves into the literary sphere and reproduces, within his critique of *Tannhäuser*, the first two stanzas of *Correspondances*. He justifies his choice as the "traduction inévitable que mon imagination fit du morceau lorsque je l'entendis pour la première fois, les yeux fermés" (*OC*: 2 784). This, in turn, anticipates Des Esseintes' penchant for synesthesia between the sonorities of words and the wide array of delirious images engendered by the character's imagination. In the same essay, Baudelaire expands on the importance of the spectator's imaginative powers in filling lacunas and providing meaning to a myriad of works of art: "c'est le propre des œuvres vraiment artistiques d'être une source inépuisable de suggestions" (*OC*: 2 784). The poet admires Wagner's talent to create

musically powerful "suggestions" by means of "[une] arabesque de sons dessinée par la passion" (*OC*: 2 784) that concretize in a recurrent set of refrains.

The plot of *A rebours* abounds with analogies between the arts, that Huysmans interweaves in an arabesque-like manner. Des Esseintes is depicted as a well-rounded art connoisseur who spends his "journées rebelles aux livres" contemplating art, reminiscing about his tumultuous life in Paris, and travelling mentally with the aid of artificial perfumes and extravagant objects (*A rebours* 152). Nevertheless, literature becomes a framework for enjoying the visual arts and music. In Chapter V, Huysmans' fictional dandy makes use of his literary and religious expertise to instill life into Redon's illustrations of Edgar Poe's poems and short stories. The same cultural baggage aids him in making intelligible Moreau's paintings of *Salomé*, as well as in recreating the milieu of Jan Luyken's (1649-1712) and Theotokopoulos' (El Greco) religious paintings. In Chapter IX, the aesthete intermixes visual art with literature in order to create an improvised play in the comfort of his home. The Duke's mistress, a ventriloquist, performs the dialogue between the Sphinx and the Chimera from Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* utilizing a dark marble Sphinx and a polychrome clay Chimera (210). In Chapter X, the protagonist, profoundly disturbed by an olfactory hallucination in the form of a lingering scent of frangipane, decides to recreate the sensation of being in a flowery meadow. The Duke is shown to employ the strategies of a writer who conceives the language of perfumes as a literary language "aussi insinuante que celle de la littérature, ce style d'une concision inouïe, sous son apparence flottante et vague" (217). Through complex combinations of artificial scents, the aesthete manufactures perfumes that reproduce his subjective understanding of the syntax of Baudelaire's poems.

The Duke's musings on the arts also reference the Baudelairean trope of nature as artificial space, expounded in the poem *Correspondances* which, as shown previously, the poet used to depict his reaction to Wagner's music. "La nature est un temple," observes the lyrical voice of the poem, a temple where perfumes, colors, and sounds converge in the mind of the observer and bring about vivid visions: "Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent/ Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité/ Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté/ Les parfums, les couleurs et le sons se répondent" (*OC* 11). The omniscient narrator of *A rebours*, imparting to the reader Des Esseintes' intimate convictions, observes that the senses of smell, hearing, and sight intermix and produce virtual artworks: "chaque sens étant susceptible… de percevoir des impressions nouvelles, de les décupler, de les coordonner, d'en composer ce tout qui constitue une œuvre" (*A rebours* 216). The arabesque-like interlacing of the senses converges into a composite opus that combines several artistic codes. Structurally, the lengthy enumeration of verbs in the infinitive is indicative of the novelist's tendency to "indulge in long, tangled" and "tortuous, complicated sentences" that are made up of "enumerations of topics and a catalogue of aesthetic enthusiasm" ("Decadence and the fin-de-siècle novel" 102; 95). Semantically, Huysmans designates a series of expansive ("décupler") and combinatory actions ("coordoner," "composer") resulting in a plurality of mental associations.

Huysmans follows up this theoretical analysis of the fusion of the arts with an example of one of Des Esseintes' creations, one that relies on an arabesque-like intertwining of the arts:

> Il avait autrefois aimé à se bercer d'accords en parfumerie ; il usait d'effets analogues à ceux des poètes, employait, en quelque sorte, l'admirable ordonnance de certaines pièces de Baudelaire, telles que "l'Irréparable" et "le Balcon," où le dernier des cinq vers qui composent la strophe est l'écho du premier et revient, ainsi qu'un refrain, noyer l'âme dans des infinis de mélancolie et de langueur.
>
> Il s'égarait dans les songes qu'évoquaient pour lui ces stances aromatiques, ramené soudain à son point de départ, au motif de sa méditation, par le retour du thème initial, reparaissant, à des intervalles ménagés, dans l'odorante orchestration du poème (*A rebours* 222).

Des Esseintes, in mixing together the different scents in his collection, acts as a polyvalent artist who is immersed in the process of creating a product that can only make sense outside of the notion of medium purity. The novelist formulates a series of striking metaphors that weave together the literary and the musical: "se bercer d'accords en parfumerie;" "usait d'effets analogues à ceux des poètes;" "stances aromatiques;" "odorante orchestration du poème." Huysmans returns to Baudelaire's poems as a source of inspiration for treating the language of perfumes as a literary language. According to Huysmans's interpretation from *A rebours*, the poet uses refrains in a meandering, hypnotic motion, returning to the point of origin, then departing in a different direction. With each departure, the lyrical voice proposes a unique "evoca[tion]." It is the arbitrariness of the analogies contained in Huysmans' lengthy sentences that renders the dynamic effect of reading a spiraling sentence ("phrase spiraloïde"). This spiraling sentence functions according to a subjective logic that makes the readers lose themselves

in the theoretical discourses, reminiscences, and waking dreams brought about by Des Esseintes' capricious mind. In fact, the character's disorderly musings are shown to confuse him as well: "il s'égarait dans les songes qu'évoquaient pour lui ces stances aromatiques." Huysmans thus constructs an aura of vagueness and mystery around the type of artwork that Des Esseintes produces or contemplates, a mystery analogous to the effect of Redon's ambiguous visual arabesques. Huysmans' desired result is to encourage the reader to constantly guess what type of artwork Des Esseintes' musings are predicated upon. This could just as easily be a poem, a novel, a painting, the refrain to a musical piece, or all of the above.

Des Esseintes' artistic credo, expressed in the chapter on perfumes, is to treat as a work of art the most mundane as well as the most eccentric entities. For instance, during a trip to Pantin, the aesthete is inspired by the scents emanating from a perfume factory, and proceeds to compose a prose poem, the "antienne de Pantin":

> Cette scène déjà lointaine se présenta subitement …abîmé dans un songe, il se répéta cette ingénieuse, mélancolique et consolante antienne qu'il avait jadis notée dès son retour dans Paris :
>
> _Oui, le temps des grandes pluies est venu ; voilà quelles gargouilles dégobillent, en chantant sous les trottoirs, et que les fumiers marinent dans des flaques qu'emplissent de leur café au lait les bols creusés dans le macadam ; partout, pour l'humble passant, les rince-pieds fonctionnent….
>
> Puisque, par le temps qui court, il n'existe plus de substance saine … il ne me semble, conclut Des Esseintes, ni plus ridicule ni plus fou, de

> demander à mon prochain une somme d'illusion à peine équivalente à celle qu'il dépense dans des buts imbéciles chaque jour, pour se figurer que la ville de Pantin est une Nice artificielle, une Menton factice.
>
> ……
>
> (*A rebours* 227-229)

This lyrical intervention, that Huysmans purposely frames within the body of the novel through the use of punctuation marks, beginning with a dialogue dash and ending with a dotted line, usually goes unnoticed by readers. Such an oversight on the part of the public is further proof of the fusion of the arts that Huysmans constructs within his plot. By the time one reaches Chapter X of the novel, one has already become so accustomed to the recurring analogies between literary genres and different mediums which make up the "expérience que Des Esseintes vit," that this insertion no longer stands out from the overall plot (Grojnowski 130). Huysmans had previously published the "Antienne de patin" in *La Revue littéraire et artistique* on September 15, 1881 with the title "Croquis Parisiens, Pantin." In *A rebours* Huysmans incorporates in the title the noun "antienne," an oxymoronic construct that adds a religious dimension to an emblematic site of Parisian industry. Moreover, "antienne," due to its meaning of a chant sung at the beginning or at the end of a psalm, dictates the prescriptive treatment of this poem, which could be read as the mantra of the modern inhabitant of an overly-industrialized Paris during the fin-de-siècle period.[17]

[17] For a stylistic analysis of Huysmans' prose poem, see Daniel Grojnovski's *Le sujet d'A rebours* pp.125-133, and Benoîte Boutron's "*A rebours*, un nouvel art (poetique) moderne?" especially pp.121-122.

Huysmans interweaves the visual and the literary in order to reproduce emotional the impact of Redon's charcoal sketches on his protagonist:

> … comme au sortir aussi d'une lecture d'Edgar Poe dont Odilon Redon semblait avoir transposé, dans un art différent, les mirages d'hallucination et les effets de peur, il [des Esseintes] …contemplait une rayonnante figure qui…se levait sereine et calme, une figure de la Mélancolie, assise, devant le disque d'un soleil, sur des rochers, dans une pose accablée et morne. (*A rebours* 155)

The literary analogy of Poe's poetics, in the case of Redon, is then reinforced by the vivid, subjective reactions of the main character, who functions both as a sounding board and as a model for the reader. This technique allows Huysmans to displace the attributes of Redon's *Mélancolie,* by choosing instead to focus on its effects on the fictional character Des Esseintes: "Par enchantement, les ténèbres se dissipaient; une tristesse charmante, une désolation en quelque sorte alanguie, coulaient dans ses pensées…" (*A rebours* 155).

The writer uses a corresponding technique in the *Appendice* to *L'Art moderne*, in which he correlates the effect of Redon's sketches and lithographs, exhibited in 1882, with the sensations engendered by musical practices; "Il serait difficile de définir l'art surprenant de M. Redon," notes the art critic.[18] He then defines the painter's style in terms of a fusion of painterly, musical, and literary codes:

> … au fond, si nous exceptons Goya dont le côté spectral est moins

[18] Gamboni argued that Huysmans did not write the *Appendice* on Redon in 1882, as Huysmans claimed, but a year later. This entails the argument that Huysmans was not the first critic to write about the work of Redon, as the writer had claimed (*The Brush and the Pen* 84-85).

> divaguant et plus réel, si nous exceptons encore Gustave Moreau dont M. Redon est, en somme, dans ses parties saines, un bien lointain élève, nous ne lui trouverons d'ancêtres que parmi des musiciens peut-être et certainement parmi des poètes. C'est, en effet, une véritable transposition d'un art dans un autre. (*L'Art moderne* 300)

Redon specialists, including Gamboni, took issue with the idea of a "transposition d'un art dans un autre," arguing that this approach would diminish Redon's autonomy as an original painter (*The Brush and the Pen* 127). Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to state that Huysmans "enrolled willy-nilly [Redon] into the company of musicians" (*The Brush and the Pen* 127). In fact, in the context of Huysmans' poetics, as exhibited in *A rebours* and *L'Art moderne*, this correspondence of artistic mediums has positive connotations. It is meant to showcase the erudition of Redon, who is a painter, a music lover, and an art theoretician, capable of examining and transposing certain techniques of Goya and Moreau into his visual universe. Brought together side by side in the literary medium of *A rebours*, the interconnections of the visual and the musical add to the arabesque-like fusion of the arts created by Huysmans.

The authorial voice of *A rebours* interprets Wagner's musical pieces as chapters in a novel whose main function is to "dessiner le caractère de ses personnages, à incarner leurs pensées, à exprimer leurs mobiles, visibles ou secrets" (328). Musical effects are depicted through the use of a literary and a pictorial lexis in a "phrase spiraloïde":

> Alors, il sentit son cerveau délirant emporté dans des ondes musicales, roulé dans les tourbillons mystiques de son enfance. Les chants appris chez les jésuites reparurent, établissant par eux-mêmes, le pensionnat, la

> chapelle, où ils avaient retenti, répercutant leurs hallucinations aux organes olfactifs et visuels, les voilant de fumée d'encens et de ténèbres irradiées par des lueurs de vitraux, sous de hauts cintres. (*A rebours* 323-324)

In this passage, Huysmans employs a series of verbs in the imperfect tense, whose purpose is to progressively re-actualize habitual past actions and sensations. First, the character feels the music affect the mechanisms of his mind. Then, he is suddenly engulfed in the whirlwind of his childhood memories. The narrative voice depicts Des Esseintes' Jesuit boarding school, which materializes before the character's eyes and those of the reader, with the musical background of religious chants. These tonalities, comparable to Wagner's stirring themes, produce an "arabesque de sons dessinée par la passion" (Baudelaire *OC* 2: 748). In turn, the reader has the option to follow closely this "tourbillon" of digressions and to accept Des Esseintes' subjective musical views as their own. Conversely, they can use the text as a springboard for their own reminiscences of musical pieces. The originality of Huysmans' literary passage is that it captures a musical experience, without arguing for the preeminence of the novel as the artistic medium par excellence. His description recognizes the value of both literary and musical mediums, and exemplifies the fruitful nature of their mutual exchanges.

Redon reaches the same result by means of the "ressources du clair-obscur" and through the "effets de la ligne abstraite, cet agent de source profonde, agissant directement sur l'esprit" (Redon, *Confidences* 25). In his journal, Redon engages in a theoretical analysis of his own style and provides an explanation of his suggestive poetics, which resonates with Baudelaire's theory of correspondences: "L'art suggestif ne

peut rien fournir sans recourir uniquement aux jeux mystérieux des ombres et du rythme des lignes mentalement conçues" (*A soi-même* 25). Both Baudelaire and Redon note that it is the spectator's imagination that intertwines words, forms, sounds, and even smells, in order to bring into existence a subjective version of a work of art.

I will now focus on four 'reworkings' or 'interpretations' by Redon, in which there is an evident "to and fro between verbal and visual image" (Gamboni, *The Brush and the Pen* 261). The most relevant to my argument of the arabesque-like, organic fusion between the arts is Redon's transposition of Des Esseintes into the visual medium. The painter adapts Huysmans' character to his particular iconographical style in one of his dark pictures (*noirs*). In 1888 Redon makes a lithograph entitled *Des Esseintes*. The composition is simple, and in line with Redon's schematic figures, with simplified, yet very expressive traits. The foreground is dominated by an oversized armchair containing an androgynous figure slumped to the right, in a meditative state, with a large bookcase as a background. The figure's body is barely discernable, covered in dark lines. Redon uses the chiaroscuro technique to give slight dimension to the body, by using darker tones around the bust and greyish tones toward the picture frame. The stark contrast between the bright face and the dark mass of the body draws attention to the figure's grimacing expression. His emaciated features, depicted through the prominent left cheekbone and the elongated nose, touching his upper lip, render the feeling of a general malaise. The right side of the face is covered in meandering lines emanating from the dark mass that is his torso, as though the figure's face is about to be submerged by the shadows.

Huysmans' reaction to this lithograph attests to Redon's mastery of ambiguity and to his use of synthetic images. In turn, these visual strategies give rise to virtuality and

several possible interpretations. We find one possible interpretation in a letter from April 22, 1888, in which Huysmans tells Redon that this is a very troubling image of Des Esseintes, "more satanic and more Hoffmannesque, more eaten up by occult sciences" than the writer had intended (*Lettres d'Odilon Redon* 112). Nevertheless, Redon's subjective vision of Des Esseintes maintains some of the attributes of Huysmans' neurotic aesthete. The figure's luminous head, framed by ripples of dark lines, denotes Des Esseintes' mental capacities, namely, his ability to abstract himself through the use of his overactive imagination, or in other words, his ability to travel the world from his armchair. The rows of books in the upper corner, framing the armchair, could be interpreted as Redon's reference to literature, an important source of inspiration for his enigmatic visual world. Moreover, the lithograph captures the core of *A rebours'* plot, which is a meditation on the experience of reading, listening to music, and actively contemplating visual art. In fact, Redon's lithograph has an effect on the observer similar to Huysmans' novel's effect on the reader, since both works incite the spectator to scrutinize Des Esseintes' reveries.

Redon's 1882 lithograph *Devant le soleil noir de la MÉLANCOLIE, Lénore apparaît* (plate II, 1882 Paris, BNF), from the album *À Edgar Poe,* as well as the charcoal and black chalk drawing entitled *Lénore* from the same year, are further examples of the painter's talent for isolating literary sources and inserting them into his ambiguous compositions, while interlacing "selected features and moments of their textual referent into a single visual statement" (*The Brush and the Pen* 116). Poe's heroine is annexed into Redon's "formal and semantic obsessions" with androgynous, mysterious figures placed in a minimalist and at times ominous setting (*The Brush and the Pen* 111). In the

foreground of the lithograph we see the profile of a woman wearing a headscarf, with exacerbated, almost disproportionate eyes, occupying the left half of the composition. She gazes intensely at a hinted point in the upper right corner of the picture, in the absorbed pose typical of Redon's figures. The "soleil noir de la mélancolie" referenced in the title occupies the background of the lithograph, cropped on either side by what appears to be sharp rock walls that meet below the figure's face, creating a confining "V" shape. These elements, which are very close to the woman's face and to the picture frame, hinder the perspective and denote a shallow space that generates claustrophobic feelings. The charcoal and black drawing gives rise to a similarly ominous effect, by placing the female heroine again to the left of the composition in a shallow, indeterminate space framed by tree trunks, with a suggested source of light in the background. The androgynous, elongated figure, who stands in a hieratic pose, gazes towards an imaginary point in the lower left corner of the composition, with a dark crow standing to her right. Her contemplative attitude is evocative of the *Des Esseintes* lithograph, while the proper noun Lenore (the French version Lénore) adds an extra layer of meaning, augmenting the feeling of an inauspicious atmosphere.

Finally, I would like to insist on the triangulation between these two visual pieces, in which Redon acknowledges his literary source, and his 1876 *Mélancolie,* a charcoal and gouache, that Huysmans references in Chapter V of *A rebours*. In the *Appendice* to *L'Art moderne*, Huysmans expresses his familiarity with Redon's Poe-inspired works exhibited at the *Gaulois*, admiring Redon's "femme étrusque, à l'attitude rigide, presque hiératique, et tenant tout à la fois des Vierges des Primitifs et des inquiétantes déesses de G. Moreau" (*L'Art moderne* 299-300). In a footnote to the *Appendice*, Huysmans notes

with great enthusiasm that "Il m'a été donné de voir, depuis cette exposition du Gaulois … une indicible *Mélancolie* aux crayons gras de couleur, une femme assise, réfléchie, seule dans l'espace qui a sangloté pour moi les douloureux lamentos du spleen" (*L'Art moderne* 300).

In the passage from *A rebours* that I have reproduced earlier in the chapter, Huysmans seems to intermix the three works by associating the noun "melancholy" with Poe's heroine Lenore, combining them in a "single visual statement," and thus utilizing Redon's interpretive technique (*The Brush and the Pen* 116). The passage from *A rebours* establishes a lineage that Redon does not mention himself in his charcoal and gouache *Mélancolie*: "comme au sortir aussi d'une lecture d'Edgar Poe dont Odilon Redon semblait avoir transposé, dans un art différent, les mirages d'hallucination et les effets de peur…se levait…une figure de la Mélancolie, assise, devant le disque d'un soleil, sur des rochers, dans une pose accablée et morne" (*A rebours* 155). If the first person singular, subjective "je" from *L'Art moderne* has been replaced by a third person singular "il," the simile "comme au sortir d'une lecture d'Édgar Poe" still intimates the presence of a subjective observer of Redon's visual production. Des Esseintes, the onlooker in *A rebours*, is familiar with the mysterious, fictional universe of Poe and therefore uses its tropes to decipher the "art différent" that manifests before his eyes in Redon's drawing. Huysmans' fictional character, therefore, makes a subjective correlation, which is validated by Redon's practice of vagueness and imprecision in his drawings and lithographs.

Redon's tactic of weaving the visual and the literary in such a way to maintain the "self-sufficiency" (*The Brush and the Pen* 111) of the final work in the pictorial realm,

while still referencing its literary inspiration, is apparent in another lithograph from the 1890 album *Les Fleurs du Mal*, titled *Parfois on trouve un vieux flacon qui se souvient,/ D'où jaillit toute vive une âme qui revient* (plate III, 1890 Paris, BNF). According to Strauss, Redon proposes a visual translation of Baudelaire's poem *Le Flacon*. This lithograph is a perfect incarnation of Redon's "jeux mystérieux des ombres et du rythme des lignes mentalement conçues," theorized in his journal, which compel the onlooker to read into the visual work, like Huysmans' aesthete Des Esseintes (*Confidences* 25). The title of the work transports us into Baudelaire's universe of correspondences between the olfactory, the tactile, and the visual. The plate features a nude, crouching female figure that seems to materialize before our eyes from a whirlwind of lines. Redon recreates a sense of instantaneousness and fugacity through the use of this dynamic swirl that at once makes up the figure and envelops it like the visual representation of a scent, rising to the upper right corner of the drawing. As in the case of the *Des Esseintes* lithograph, the literary reference to Baudelaire's poem *Le Flacon* is evoked by a series of very thin lines encasing the figure in a shape that stands for a perfume bottle. Huysmans himself uses metonymy in an analogous manner to Redon, in the episode when his aesthete character, enraptured by Moreau's *Salomé*, projects onto the painting his sexual desires. Subsequently, the sight of the female figure, dancing in the temple before Herod, triggers in his imagination "l'odeur perverse des parfums" (*A rebours* 142). Des Esseintes also manipulates his senses by tasting and smelling the "Perles des Pyrénées," purple bonbons that are designed to artificially reproduce "une goutte d'essence féminine" (*A Rebours* 205). Their "arôme amoureux" reactivates in Des Esseintes' imagination "un coin de nudité," akin to Redon's whirlwind of lines, visually signaling a bouquet of fragrances

from which emerge the outlines of the character's former mistresses, Miss Urania and the ventriloquist (*A Rebours* 205).

Art that Mimics the Irregular Pattern of the Characters' Thought Process

I turn now to my second argument, namely, that *A rebours*, like a number of Redon's dark charcoal drawings and lithographs, renders the unpredictable meanderings of characters' and figures' thought processes by means of an irregular, arabesque-like style. As Gamboni in *Potential Images* and Charles Bernheimer in "Huysmans: Syphilis, Hysteria and Sublimation" point out, Huysmans and Redon were well versed in contemporaneous scientific theories on the development of cognitive science and on the way in which the human mind was able to alter the accuracy of the senses.[19] The correlation of aesthetics and medicine represents a major trope in fin-de-siècle discourses. For instance, Charcot's artistic choreographies of the hysterical female's body, displayed in front of an audience composed of medical professionals and writers, including Huysmans, during his "Leçons du mardi," represent a prominent example of this correlation.[20] Charcot's so-called hysterical female patients, in sensuous poses, doubled as muses for painters such as Pierre André Brouillet (*Jean-Martin Charcot Demonstrating a Hysterical Case at the Salpêtriere*, ca. 1887) and photographers such as

[19] See especially pp. 183-195 in *Potential Images* and pp. 251-253 in Bernheimer's article.

[20] In "Huysmans: Syphilis, Hysteria, and Sublimation" Bernheimer notes that during Charcot's public lessons, working-class women were "put on exhibit -- prostituted in the literal sense of 'placed forth in public'-- before an eager bourgeois male audience that included not only medical professionals, such as Freud, but also literary men, such as Maupassant and Huysmans, politicians, painters, sculptors, architects, and interested spectators from all walks of life" (252).

D.-M. Bourneville and P. Régnard (*Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 1878).[21] In his psychoanalytic examination of *A rebours,* Bernheimer argues that Huysmans' obsession with the female body ravaged by syphilis was in fact inspired by Doctor Charcot's findings (259).

Redon, in his dark drawings from the 1870s and 1880s, used evocative, abstract shapes surrounding figures in pensive poses, with the purpose of providing a material conceptualization of their thoughts and affective states. The key features of Redon's style, according to Gamboni, are "the primacy of imagination, the cult of the materials used, and a method of composition invented in the course of execution" (*Potential Images* 68). In *A soi-même*, the painter defines the underlying principles of his visual productions: "Le sens du mystère, c'est d'être tout le temps dans l'équivoque, dans les double, triple aspects, des soupçons d'aspect (images dans images), formes qui vont être, ou qui le seront selon l'état d'esprit du regardeur" (100). Redon's equivocal, meandering shapes correspond to Huysmans' hypnotically lengthy phrases from *A rebours*, which are constructed around the character's responses to external stimuli, rather than on his objective experiences. Starting from these premises, I contend that the painter and the writer create a serpentine, arabesque-like poetics, which takes into account the subjective nature of sensory experience in the artistic realm. Daniel Grojnowski remarks that Des Esseintes' "constitution de névrosé l'amène à composer son existence come le peintre ou le poète composent leurs œuvres" (*Le Sujet d'A rebours* 93). Expanding on Grojnowski's theory, I suggest that Huysmans uses the theme of the decadent aristocrat with impaired

[21] On the subjective and stylized nature of Charcot's photographic records of hysterical women from the Salpêtrière asylum, see Georges Didi-Huberman's notable cultural study *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*.

senses as a methodology of his novel. The intrigue thus follows the ebbs and flows of Des Esseintes' neurosis in the same manner that Redon's visual practices hint at his pensive figures' "inner mental space" (*Potential Images* 76).

Zola had theorized the incorporation of mental illness into the literary field in *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), in which he postulated that the novel of scientific observation "substitue à l'étude de l'homme abstrait, de l'homme métaphysique, l'étude de l'homme naturel, soumis aux lois physico-chimiques et déterminé par les influences du milieu" (333). It is also noteworthy that an analysis of neurosis was disseminated in Paul Bourget's studies on decadence titled *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (1883), published a year prior to *A rebours*. This scientific interest in mental illness and its effects on perception flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was a very prolific period for science and technology, marking the advent of optical illusions, photography, cinema, and X-rays, as well as philosophical and scientific treatises on the influence of the human mind on sensory perception.[22]

Taine's psychological treatise *De l'intelligence* (1870) relativizes the accuracy of external perception itself, as an "inner dream in harmony with things outside of us," that needs to be understood as "une hallucination vraie" (*De l'intelligence* 1:12, qtd. *Potential Images* 183). From 1872-1883, Charcot's studies on neurosis, hysteria, and obsessive dreams at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris were widely disseminated in scientific reviews in France and did not go unnoticed by avant-garde artists and positivist writers. The specialized jargon used both by Redon in *Confidences d'artiste* and Huysmans in *A rebours* attests to their familiarity with these theories. Moreover, in 1880 the psychiatrist

[22] See *Potential Images* Chapter X, "In the World of Ideas," pp. 183-200.

Cesare Lombroso and the writer Maxime du Camp published an article titled "L'arte nei pazzi," which provided a psychoanalytic interpretation of the artistic productions of mental patients (*Archivio di Psichiatria* 1:424-437, qtd. Gamboni 191).[23] Lombroso, who possessed an extensive collection of asylum art, concluded that the mentally ill tend to express themselves through abstract geometrical shapes and arabesque-like forms (qtd. Gamboni 191). In addition, Michel Foucault remarked in *The Abnormal,* a series of public lectures at the Collège de France*,* that due to the rise of penal psychiatry, nineteenth-century discourses came to be centered around the concept of the ill individual who needed to be studied and corrected for the greater good of society as a whole.[24]

Commentators have shown that before writing *A rebours,* Huysmans had scrupulously researched the topic of neurosis, and had read a number of contemporary studies, including Bouchut's *Le Névrosisme aigu et chronique* and Axenfeld's *Traité des névroses.*[25] If it is clear that Huysmans' research on mental illness did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries, it is equally clear that the novel's constant focus on neurosis was poorly received by critics. In his article from *Le Constitutionnel*, Barbey d'Aurevilly ironized the scientific leaning of Huysmans' novel, dismissing it as cliché and asserting that Des Esseintes is "un malade comme tous les héros de roman de cette époque malade. Il est en proie à la névrose du siècle. Il est de l'hôpital Charcot" (*Le Constitutionnel*, July 28, 1884).

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[23] For a discussion of the collaboration between the Italian psychiatrist and the French photographer and writer, see the web article "Cesare Lombroso and Maxime du Camp," www.artandmedicine.com/biblio/authors/italia/Lombroso1880.html.

[24] See especially Chapters I and II, pp. 1-54.

[25] See Laurence Porter's article "Huysmans' *A rebours*: The Psychodynamics of Regression."

Indeed, at first glance, the plot of *A rebours* is fairly straightforward. The neurotic aristocrat indulges in aesthetic contemplation of eccentric art, while suffering from frequent sensory hallucinations. To maintain the reality effect, Huysmans fills each chapter of *A rebours* with medical jargon, using a discourse that mimics expert psychiatric treatises. Seemingly emulating the Naturalist-Positivist framework, Huysmans employs a scientific tone to proclaim that: "Pendant cette singulière maladie qui ravage les races à bout de sang, de soudaines accalmies succèdent aux crises" (*A rebours* 215). Nevertheless, this approach did not ring true to critics of the time, who noted that the vocabulary pertaining to psychological disorders hindered, rather than supported, the cohesiveness of *A rebours*.

In a critique for the *Revue Catholique*, E. L. Ouduy gave a scathing review of the novel, in which, in his view, almost nothing happens: "C'est absurde! C'est stupide! dites-vous. — Oui! mais si vous saviez comme c'est ennuyeux!" (*La Revue Catholique,* July 15, 1884). The critic was mostly unsatisfied by the nonessential, whimsical nature of the medical treatments that the Duke undergoes: "Alors description et énumération de tous les médicaments et de tous les *lavements* qu'il s'administre matin et soir: lavements onctueux, purgatifs, nourrissants, lénitifs, gras, maigres (les vendredis), bénins, laxatifs, etc. Il n'en guérit pas. — Et après? — c'est tout" (*La Revue Catholique,* July 15, 1884). What most irritated this commentator was the fact that Des Esseintes' health neither improved, nor evolved into a more severe pathology leading to his demise.

Zola had a similar objection to the novel. The father of literary Naturalism reproached Huysmans for what he saw as a lack of structure and logic in the intrigue, as well as a lack of methodical character development:

> Peut-être est-ce mon tempérament de constructeur qui regimbe, mais il me déplaît que Des Esseintes soit aussi fou au commencement qu'à la fin, qu'il n'y ait pas une progression quelconque, que les morceaux soient toujours amenés par une transition pénible d'auteur, que vous nous montriez enfin un peu la lanterne magique, au hasard des verres. (*Lettres inédites à Emile Zola* 106)

While Huysmans is a "constructeur" like Zola, his particular creation has an elusive architecture that gives the appearance of instability and disorder. The writer astutely cultivates multiple layers of ambiguity around his character's mental illness, and emphasizes the transitions between the various episodes of the plot according to a meandering logic, which Zola finds intrusive and dilettantish. He therefore reprimands Huysmans for showing his readers the "lanterne magique" of literary production and blatantly revealing his presence in the "transition pénible d'auteur" (106). Furthermore, it was this lack of progression and these capricious transitions that determined some of Huysmans' contemporaries to think that the writer himself was mentally ill: "D'autres entrepreneurs de critique voulurent bien m'aviser qu'il me serait profitable de subir, dans une prison thermale, le fouet des douches…" (*A rebours* 76). This critical reaction of interpreting fictional psychosomatic symptoms as evidence of the artist's state of health is, in fact, an example of the influence of the pervasive discourse on normalization that intensified at the turn of the century, which Foucault discusses in *The Abnormal* (1-29).

Both Zola and Huysmans strayed, in different ways, from the harsh constraints of scientific accuracy.[26] In the chapter of *A rebours* dedicated to Des Esseintes' favorite

[26] Zola's partial abandonment of a strictly positivist ideology is reflected in his utopian cycle *Quatre Evangiles* (1898-1902). Likewise, Huysmans' literary productions after his conversion to

writers, the Duke expresses his boundless admiration for the depth of Baudelaire's psychological analysis, omitting Zola's contribution to the study of heredity and milieu in the character's development from the Rougon-Macquart cycle. Huysmans' choice could be interpreted as a disavowal of Zola's brand of Naturalism, which also determined his departure from the Médan group.[27] As I have already established, Baudelaire is a salient presence in *A rebours*. The protagonist is in awe of the poet's poignant psychological examination, which renders "les états morbides les plus fuyants, les plus tremblés, des esprits épuisés et des âmes tristes" (*A rebours* 254). In this particular case, Des Esseintes' literary analysis mirrors Huysmans' way of thinking through his writing practice. In other words, these "états morbides les plus fuyants" not only permeate every chapter of the novel, but also shape the structure of the plot (254). Anemia, neurosis, syphilis, and the sensory delirium associated with these ailments are major tropes that connect the various episodes of the novel. It is accurate to say that *A rebours* takes on the attributes of a narrative that produces a "fantastique de maladie et de délire" (*A rebours* 154).

To all intents and purposes, Huysmans sets the stage in the *Notice,* presenting the Duke Jean Des Esseintes as "anémique et nerveux," the "seul rejeton" of a once grandiose aristocratic family (78). Yet, the omniscient narrator quickly dispels the reader's expectations of a structured plot that reproduces the Positivist, doctor-patient model theorized by Zola in his *Roman expérimental.* Far from being an accurate medical

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Catholicism have a strong religious component, in dissonance with rigid empirical thinking. See also Chapter III of this current study, in which I discuss Zola's penchant for the lyrical and how it unsettles his positivist rigor. On Huysmans' mystical phase, see Baldick, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans,* especially the chapters "The Convert," pp. 240-256, and "The Penitent," pp. 257-279.

[27] See Baldick, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans,* especially the chapter "The Decadent," pp. 119-136.

treatise, the account of Des Esseintes' neurosis defies any diagnosis, and describes the illness as manifesting itself according to a completely unpredictable, arabesque-like structure:

> La maladie reprit sa marche ; des phénomènes inconnus l'escortèrent. Après les cauchemars, les hallucinations de l'odorat, les troubles de la vue, la toux rêche, réglée de même qu'une horloge, les bruits des artères et du cœur et les suées froides, surgirent les illusions de l'ouïe, ces altérations qui ne se produisent que dans la dernière période du mal. (*A rebours* 323)

The novelist depicts the aristocrat's neurosis as an ongoing source of wonderment ("des phénomènes inconnus l'escortèrent") at the spectacle of the ever-changing outside world, molded by his inaccurate senses. The decadent aesthete represents a model of both the Baudelairean convalescent creator, and of the avant-garde spectator, who is in awe of the unexpected effects produced by his bizarre psychosomatic symptoms. Des Esseintes uses the same strategies to observe his own distorted perceptions as he does to contemplate the works of art in his collection. It follows that the Duke's neurosis becomes a source of artistic experimentation, while the narrative renders through textual means, in an arabesque structure, the non-linear hallucinations engendered by his faulty impressions. This is possible because the omniscient narrator of the novel shows no interest in labeling Des Esseintes as a degenerate according to the cultural conventions of the time. That is to say that, in creating this fictional character whose neurosis cannot be corrected through medical means, Huysmans provides an alternative model to the prevailing societal narratives of degeneracy and mental illness, which assessed the individual from a "psycologico-moral" perspective (*The Abnormal* 18).

Des Esseintes, like the mysterious figures populating Redon's dark drawings (*les noirs*), is shown to be mindful of the "active, interpretative nature of perception" (*Potential Images* 168). "Le tout," states the fictional character, in free indirect speech, "est de savoir s'y prendre, de savoir concentrer son esprit sur un seul point, de savoir s'abstraire suffisamment pour amener l'hallucination et pouvoir substituer le rêve de la réalité à la réalité même" (*A rebours* 103). There are several similarities between the way in which Des Esseintes detaches himself in order to trigger his hallucinations, and the techniques he uses to create a synesthetic, olfactory language, enabling him to delight in the experience of dream imagery during his waking moments. This practice is as much about the aesthete's indulgence in his subjectively constructed universe, as it is about supporting an alternative mode of cultural expression, one that invites readers to engage in individualized interpretations of artworks. The following passage further illustrates this point:

> Des Esseintes étudiait, analysait l'âme de ces fluides, faisait l'exégèse de ces textes ; il se complaisait à jouer pour sa satisfaction personnelle, le rôle d'un psychologue, à démonter et à remonter les rouages d'une œuvre, à dévisser les pièces formant la structure d'une exhalaison composée, et, dans cet exercice, son odorat était parvenu à la sûreté d'une touche presque impeccable. (*A rebours* 219)

The protagonist, who now shifts his position from neuropathic patient to medical expert, takes it upon himself to theorize the underlying principles of a quality artwork, according to his personal theories, which are, nevertheless, influenced by his olfactory hallucinations.

What interests me in this excerpt is Huysmans' ability to construct an intricate psychological tableau of his neurotic aristocrat. Similarly to Redon's visual technique of inscribing suggestive shapes that reference the inner world of his figures, the novelist presents in great detail the thought process of his character. For his personal enjoyment, Des Esseintes studies, analyzes, makes the exegesis, and composes and decomposes an array of scents in order to produce his own desired scent. Nevertheless, that particular scent is ambiguous since, in view of the character's fluctuating sensory disturbances, it is a scent unique to him, and a very different scent to someone with fully functioning sensory abilities. Thus, Des Esseintes both composes a scent and experiences his oeuvre in a very subjective way. In this sense, it could be argued that Huysmans and Redon foreground Jacques Rancière's theory of the emancipated spectator, who is at once active and contemplative. The spectator's emancipation, notes Rancière, "commence quand on comprend que regarder est aussi une action qui confirme ou transforme cette distribution des positions. Le spectateur… observe, il sélectionne, il compare, il interprète… Il compose son propre poème avec les éléments du poème en face de lui" (*Le Spectateur émancipé* 19).

To better grasp the writing strategies and thematic patterns that Huysmans utilizes throughout the entire novel, I will examine the passage that deals with the effects of Schumann's violoncello compositions on Des Esseintes' nervous system. This passage is part of the penultimate chapter of *A rebours*, in which Des Esseintes suffers from a severe sensory hallucination that requires treatment from a physician, resulting in his return to the capital:

> Et toujours lorsqu'elles lui revenaient aux lèvres, ces exquises et funèbres plaintes évoquaient pour lui un site de banlieue, un site avare, muet, où, sans bruit, au loin, des files de gens, harassés par la vie, se perdaient, courbés en deux, dans le crépuscule, alors qu'abreuvé d'amertumes, gorgé de dégoût, il se sentait, dans la nature éplorée, seul, tout seul, terrassé par une indicible mélancolie, par une opiniâtre détresse, dont la mystérieuse intensité excluait toute consolation, toute pitié, tout repos. Pareil à un glas de mort, ce chant désespéré le hantait, maintenant qu'il était couché, anéanti par la fièvre et agité par une anxiété d'autant plus inapaisable qu'il n'en discernait plus la cause. Il finissait par s'abandonner à la dérive, culbuté par le torrent d'angoisses que versait cette musique tout d'un coup endiguée, pour une minute, par le chant des psaumes, qui s'élevait, sur un ton lent et bas, dans sa tête dont les tempes meurtries lui semblaient frappées par des battants de cloches. (*AR* 329-330)

In this excerpt, as well as in the entire novel, Huysmans uses a structural pattern in which an event, an object, a sound, a scent, a literary passage, or a work of visual art is introduced, then followed with a lengthy elaboration on the ways in which the ensuing stimuli (auditory, visual, olfactory, etc.) trigger the Duke's psychosomatic responses. As a result, readers are given the opportunity to compare their own opinions of the piece with those of Des Esseintes, or, if unfamiliar with the artwork, to experience it through the character's dynamic responses to it: "culbuté," with his "tempes meurtries" (AR 330). The writer uses lengthy phrases abounding with catalogues that have a hallucinatory effect. Huysmans fashions a complex syntax with "hachée, lancinante, à la fois agitée,

fiévreuse… à l'image de Des Esseintes" (Boutron 131; 134). This tactic extends to the whole plot, where Huysmans entwines together, in the same chapter, and at times in the same scene, distant themes and concepts, held together by frequent subjective reminiscences that are determined by sensory stimuli.

In the present excerpt, Des Esseintes, who is at home afflicted by auditory illusions, mentally transports himself, using the faculty of recollection, to "un site de banlieue," whose atmosphere and inhabitants are depicted through extensive catalogues. Then, the character's affects are interwoven, following an arabesque, winding pattern: "qu'abreuvé d'amertumes, gorgé de dégoût, il se sentait… seul, tout seul, terrassé par une indicible mélancolie, par une opiniâtre détresse." The adverb "maintenant" marks the temporal shift from an indeterminate past, rendered by the imperfect tense, to the present moment, in which Des Esseintes is suffering from the effects of his neurosis, "anéanti par la fièvre et agité par une anxiété." Huysmans uses medical jargon as a pretense for establishing his character's neurochemical profile according to the contemporary scientific discourses on neurosis, monomania, and anxiety. In spite of the long lists of symptoms, however, the writer refrains from any definitive conclusions regarding Des Esseintes' character, and constantly shifts between codes of mental pathology and aesthetic theory. There is no organizing, objective chronology, but rather, a subjective chronology engendered by the neurotic mind of Des Esseintes. The arabesque composition determines the erring nature of the plot that is made up of the unexpected oscillations of Des Esseintes' actions, tastes, and convictions, caused by recurrent visual, auditory, gustatory, cutaneous, and olfactory hallucinations.

Huysmans' subversion of a clear, linear narrative structure, and his use of literary tonalities and striking phrases that reproduce positive or negative moods, has an effect on the reader similar to that produced by music. Literature and the visual arts, like music, tap into the individual's mental mechanisms and produce formidable experiences of gratification, pain, and anxiety. In the case of Huysmans and Redon, their artistic production maintains some of its representational qualities, by which I mean that it is not entirely abstract. Nevertheless, it incorporates, in a dynamic, meandering movement, abstract features with identifiable themes. For instance, Wagner's music, which Baudelaire reproduced in the literary realm through his poem *Correspondances*, uses repetitive rhythmic patterns that yield "appropriately hypnotic or enervated states" (Youens 469).

Edmond de Goncourt, an attentive reader of *A rebours*, who was evidently moved by these "hypnotic or enervated states" ensuing from the style of the novel, noted in his *Journal* on May 16, 1884, shortly after the publication of *A rebours,* that: "Voilà un joli névrosé. On dira tout ce qu'on voudra contre le livre, c'est un livre qui apporte une petite fièvre à la cervelle, et les livres qui produisent cela sont des livres d'hommes de talent. Et une écriture artiste par là-dessus…" (*Journal* 13: 121-122). Edmond, who coined the phrase *écriture artiste,* promotes his own brand of literature while affiliating *A rebours* with a type of poetics that instills "une petite fièvre à la cervelle" of the readers who immerse themselves in the unique universe of this work of art. As Evlyn Gould points out regarding the affinities between Huysmans and Mallarmé, *A rebours* "presents the process of reader identification in terms of the capacity of the reader's mind to mobilize a series of sensual analogies on the basis of a single symbol" (65). These analogies, which

generate feverish mental states, echo the sensory hallucinations brought about by neurotic attacks, and follow an arabesque-like logic.

Redon too reflects, in his journal, on the power of music to spark the individual's imagination, and to affect the listener's mood: "La musique est le ferment d'une sensibilité spéciale, très aiguë... Je veux dire que son charme est irrésistible, et l'on s'évade en esprit avec elle si promptement dans un monde meilleur …" (*A soi-même* 99). Strident chords, similarly to sharp shapes, can provoke feelings of pain, while dissonances, similarly to figures with distorted attributes, such as Redon's recurring enlarged eyes and misshapen humanoid heads, can intimate feelings of discomfort and fear. Huysmans, in his criticism of Redon's 1882 exhibit, was struck by the "faces en poires tapées et en cônes, des têtes avec des crânes sans cervelets, des mentons fuyants, des fronts bas, se joignant directement aux nez, puis des yeux immenses, des yeux fous, jaillissant de visages humains, déformés, comme dans des verres de bouteille, par le cauchemar" (*Art moderne* 298). The writer's reflections in *A rebours* on how perceptions "déformés, comme dans des verres de bouteille, par le cauchemar" spur mental phenomena, resonate with Redon's theories on the "lignes mentalement conçues" engendered by "[les] jeux mysterieux des ombres" (*A soi-même* 25).

In Redon's color paintings from the 1890s on, the painter often employs abstract, suggestive shapes surrounding the human figures that can be read as material projections, onto the visible world, of the character's diaphanous mental processes. However, I shall not elaborate on these later artworks, in view of their chronological distance from the publication of *A rebours*. Instead, my study focuses on his earlier charcoal drawings. For instance, in *Tête fumante,* Redon's drawing that appeared on the cover of the magazine

La Vie Moderne in October 1885, the artist depicts a what looks like a female figure, seen in the customary profile pose, wearing an elaborate headdress.[28] Upon closer inspection, one becomes aware of the ambiguous nature of the image. The figure's gender becomes suddenly very difficult to determine, while the headpiece could double as a visual representation of "the ungraspable realm of thought" (*The Brush and the Pen* 69). Another example of a figure in a meditative pose, framed by flowing lines that illustrate the character's reflections and sensations, is the graphite and color drawing *Femme de profil* (circa 1871), also known as *Femme au képi*. It depicts a woman wearing a military style cap and gazing downwards, towards the left, in a meditative pose. She is framed by arabesque-like shapes dotted with golden spots of color that take up the entire left side of the painting and intensify, as a swirl, from the bottom left corner towards the upper left. Their source, which is cropped by the picture frame, coincides with the direction of the woman's gaze. This leads to the conclusion that the irregular, intertwining lines that produce an ambiguous shape are a material conceptualization of the figure's abstract thoughts.

Redon's equivocating shapes, which spur the onlooker's imagination, correspond to Des Esseintes' ideal of the perfect artwork. In the eloquent chapter on the modern writers from *A rebours,* the narrator sums up the protagonist's artistic credo as follows:

> …il souhaitait une indécision troublante sur laquelle il pût rêver, jusqu'à ce qu'il la fit, à sa volonté, plus vague ou plus ferme selon l'état momentané de son âme. Il voulait, en somme, une œuvre d'art et pour ce qu'elle était par elle-même et pour ce qu'elle pouvait permettre de lui

[28] This drawing by Redon is reproduced and analyzed by Gamboni in *The Brush and The Pen,* p. 69.

> prêter, il voulait aller avec elle, grâce à elle, comme soutenu par un adjuvant, comme porté par un véhicule, dans une sphère où les sensations sublimées lui imprimeraient une commotion inattendue et dont il chercherait longtemps et même vainement à analyser les causes. (296)

This excerpt is relevant to my discussion of Huysmans' and Redon's arabesque poetics, because it encapsulates an outlook on art that bridges the differences between nineteenth-century modern art and the abstract aesthetic experiments occurring in the first decades of the twentieth century. The authorial voice's attitude towards art, which provides the structural underpinning of the novel, endorses subjective analogies and capricious reminiscences, like those produced by Redon. Moreover, this passage supports the fusion of the arts and hybridity, rather than purity, of medium, since the protagonist "voulait, en somme, une œuvre d'art," with a striking effect on him, what Edmond de Goncourt called the "petite fièvre à la cervelle." The ideal work, as portrayed in *A rebours*, allows for an active, thinking reader-spectator, who travels mentally to unanticipated corners of his mind through correspondences and analogies triggered by his or her senses. The reader is a flâneur who "s'égarait dans les songes qu'évoquaient pour lui ces stances aromatiques" (*A rebours* 222). This is possible because in *A rebours*, Huysmans proposes divagations on various forms of art, written in a sinuous style that follows the ebb and the flow of the main character's neurotic caprices.

To sum up, Huysmans' *A rebours* and Redon's dark drawings and lithographs from the 1870s and 1880s set forth a poetics that follows an irregular, arabesque-like aesthetics. This manifests itself in these creators' seamless analogies between artistic mediums, rendered literarily and painterly through meandering and suggestive constructs.

The ensuing artistic productions refute medium specificity. These artistic productions also shed light on the nineteenth-century cultural context, shaped by scientific theories on the functioning of the human mind and its effects on the process of representation. The great mobility of the poetics of Huysmans and Redon opens up a space marked by ambiguity in which contraries intersect as components of a curvilinear arabesque poetics. Ultimately, this conception of art allows for the shifting positions of writer and painter, creator and spectator, doctor and patient, and calls for an emancipated spectator.

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