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*Massenet, Marianne and Mary:  
Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition  
at the Opera*

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**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
Department of Music, City University,  
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## Abstract

The social and political practice of the French Third Republic resonated with a variety of contrasting ideologies which were reflected in cultural products and their reception, including opera. The operas of Jules Massenet, the most successful Parisian opera composer of his time, provide a good example of this kind of cultural mediation. A close examination of Massenet's operas will thus allow a re-evaluation of the complex interaction between art and society in musical culture at the end of the nineteenth century in France.

Representative case-studies have been chosen, and the works are read in the contemporary Parisian context of moral and political debate. I examine the operas with respect to the choice of subject matter, the libretto and its genesis (especially transformations made in the process of creating a libretto), the music (both in its relation to the specific drama and musical convention of the time), the staging and its messages, and the critical reception in the press. The main chapters are dedicated to the following issues:

1. *Mary or Marianne?* The social, moral and cultural context, particularly regarding women, is explored via a close reading of sources from the second half of the nineteenth century.
2. *Le Prêtre, la Femme et la Famille*. Anticlericalism and Republicanism as reflected in Massenet's opera *Hérodiade* and its reception history are addressed. Also discussed is the icon of the Republican mother, sexual desire and the question of divorce (hotly debated at the time of the opera's première).
3. *Dreams of Decadence, or the Death of Positivism*. Viewing the medium of the dream scene in Massenet's operas *Hérodiade* and then *Thaïs*, this chapter allows an exploration of the significance of the dream world and degeneracy in the decadent and symbolist aesthetics of the last two decades of the nineteenth century in France, and their implications for the reigning Third-Republican positivist ideology.
4. *La Pornocratie*. This reading of the opera *Thaïs* addresses the way in which French fin-de-siècle art and society dealt with the 'femme nouvelle'. Programmatic orchestral music in opera and its capacity to translate human passions and voice is examined.

## Introduction

In French fin-de-siècle society, the public and political forums resonated with a variety of contrasting ideological debates, from republicanism to monarchism, from anticlericalism and feminism to Catholicism. These issues were reflected in cultural products and their reception, particularly opera, a musical genre that may be described as *the nation's image*.<sup>1</sup> One of the most pertinent examples for this kind of cultural work is the operas of Jules Massenet, the most successful Parisian opera composer of his time. Unlike other composers such as Berlioz, Saint-Saëns and Wagner, however, Massenet left no writings that would suggest his own political or ideological notions or the way in which they may have been explored and inscribed in his operas. Whilst remaining faithful to Third-Republican and state institutions (the Conservatoire, the Académie nationale de musique, the Société nationale de musique, the Institut de France and its Académie des Beaux-Arts), Massenet's overwhelming desire to achieve artistic and material credibility, respect and success outweighs any reading of his political leanings gained through the meagre documents accounting for adherence to Republican society's benchmarks. With this in mind, it is predominantly through close and careful examination of his operas' libretti and scores that we may understand and re-evaluate Massenet's contribution to opera and the complex interaction between art and society in the musical culture of the French *fin de siècle*. We still need to understand the way in which the operas of Massenet, as well as those of his contemporaries in Paris, mirror contemporary moral debate, for but few studies pertaining to these matters have been undertaken in recent years.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from Massenet and opera, the subject of my thesis unites three main themes: Catholicism, republicanism and women. During the Second Empire (1852-1870), Catholicism flourished. With its increased popularity and, therefore, influence, came a resurgence of anticlericalism on both social and political levels. This renaissance of Catholicism, emerging during the 1860s, continued to prosper during the Third Republic, even as the republicans' laicisation policies, particularly in the area of education, were slowly but irrevocably imposed on French society. The Church,

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to Jane Fulcher's, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

aligned with the monarchist political right, reacted hostilely to progressive change. Hence, the two camps, Catholics, whether traditional or liberal, and Republicans, whether conservative or positivist, became firm 'opponents'. Even though a large number of Republican moralists held with traditional values (similar to those of the Church) regarding women and their role within society, the two schools of thought approached the new regime's reforms from very different standpoints. In the midst of this social and political turmoil, the bourgeois feminist movement gained momentum. Women's voices, from Catholic to liberal anticlerical, began to be heard. Providing an alternative way to that prescribed by both the Church and the Republic, liberal feminism steered a treacherous course through the political ocean, slowly gaining new rights for women. It is the reflection of these 'opposing ideologies' in Massenet's operas that informs the title of my thesis and forms the basis of its argument. From there, diverse political and social currents and trends within Third-Republican society are explored, including Protestantism, free-thought, the supernatural, orientalism and decadence.

In going about the task of studying opera, it seems necessary to review, if only briefly, opera criticism over the last forty years. In 1987, James Webster did much the same thing in his controversial article 'To Understand Verdi and Wagner We Must Understand Mozart'.<sup>3</sup> His overview of opera analysis included a variety of approaches from the philosophical writings of Nietzsche and Dahlhaus, through Alfred Lorenz's 'comprehensive' Wagner studies of the 1920s to landmark publications such as Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama* in the 1950s and Frits Noske's *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* in the 1970s, ending with more recent studies (then yet to be published) such as Carolyn Abbate's and Roger Parker's volume of collected essays *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*.<sup>4</sup> Webster then proffered some examples of his own analyses of Mozart operas to serve as models to those who wished to study both eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century opera, having found no consummate way to analyse

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<sup>2</sup>Articles have been published by writers such as Annegret Fauser, Anselm Gerhard, Steven Huebner, Ralph P. Locke and Jann Pasler.

<sup>3</sup> *19th-Century Music*, 11, 2, Fall 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1956). Further references to this book apply to Kerman's revised edition of 1986, published in paperback by Faber and Faber in London in 1989. Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (The Hague:



the music of opera, no completely coherent methodology in any of the studies reviewed.<sup>5</sup> Whilst convincingly packaged as an alternative way to get to grips with musical issues in opera, Webster's models have since been bypassed and opera scholars have continued to develop the traditional ways to look at music in opera based on melodic, motivic, tonal, harmonic, formal and instrumental observation and comparison.

Noske wrote in the preface to his 1977 monograph :

I have analysed the structure of an opera by seeking and examining *factors* in the musico-dramatic *process*, whereas analysts of form are generally preoccupied with the study of *elements* contained in the musical *object*. [...] musicologists have treated opera as a musical object, analysing its component elements as if they were consecutive movements of a symphony or a string quartet. Questions concerning both verbal and musical drama, as, for example, manipulation of time, point of attack, monologue and dialogue, dramatic rhythm or audience participation are almost always ignored in scholarly writings on opera. Even specific operatic problems (eg. what is the exact function of a libretto?) are evaded or overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

Although Noske seems to deny the relevance of traditional analytical concepts and, to some extent, techniques for opera, both Noske's and Kerman's studies are grounded, nevertheless, in the idea that, in opera, the composer is the dramatist: it is music that generates action and articulates the drama. Noske holds a wider view of what constitutes opera than Kerman—who problematically ignores and dismisses any dramatic or articulating function possessed by the libretto or other extra-musical factors—and Noske's interest in the semiotic processes of operatic music opens up the rather narrow vein outlined by Kerman. Noske states:

Drama is essentially a matter of communication, and since [...] communication is effected by means of signs, the study of the sign process is of vital importance for [...] opera.<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to define such signs as:

A musical unit which stresses, clarifies, invalidates, contradicts or supplies an element of the libretto. The sign is semantically interpretable and discloses dramatic truth.<sup>8</sup>

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Martinus Nijhoff, 1977); Abbate & Parker (eds.), *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Webster's analyses present a rather tidy synthesis of commentary and analytical techniques which could be described as a sort of Schoenbergian/Schenkerian amalgam.

<sup>6</sup> This citation is taken from p. vii of the paperback edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), and all further citations refer to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Noske, viii.

<sup>8</sup> Noske, 316.

By clarifying and formulating the semiotic processes at work in opera, a concept which Kerman had nevertheless employed, Noske showed the way forward for opera criticism.

Catherine Clément's book, *Opéra, ou la défaite des femmes*, was first published in French in 1979, although its widespread impact in the Anglo-American musicological world depended upon its translation in 1988.<sup>9</sup> However polemical this book was or still is, it nevertheless helped to implode traditional opera studies. Introducing feminist, literary, psychoanalytical and philosophical theories with the quirky flair of much French academic writing, Clément addressed opera in a new theoretical framework. Clément could approach opera in such a way because her study dealt mainly with opera libretti. Arthur Groos, in his and Roger Parker's 1988 collection of essays *Reading Opera*,<sup>10</sup> noted the resistance to the study of libretti, traced its history, and one year later Abbate and Parker proposed the following:

Opera is not music alone; it lives in association with poetry and dramatic action, [...] 'Analyzing opera' should mean not only 'analyzing music' but simultaneously engaging, with equal sophistication, the poetry and drama.<sup>11</sup>

Libretti had become a legitimate source of enquiry, and this revisionist programme deftly dismissed the notion that opera is primarily music. However, the reflection that opera's words and music should be treated with "equal sophistication" no doubt grew out of the criticisms of Clément's book. Clément's "attentiveness to the thematics and machinations of opera plots" dealt with musical issues, although not in technical detail.<sup>12</sup> Ignoring the premises of her immediate predecessor Noske, as well as Kerman, Clément began with and concentrated on the opera's text, peppering her rhetoric with musical references. This did not imply, as Noske feared, that scholars such as Clément progressed from the 'signified' to the 'signifier', and he warned of the pitfalls this methodological approach presented for researchers:

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<sup>9</sup> Clément, *Opéra, ou la défaite des femmes* (Paris, 1979), translated by Betsy Wing as *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Further references to this book apply to the paperback edition published by Virago Press in London in 1989 with a foreword by Susan McClary.

<sup>10</sup> Groos's introduction to Groos & Parker (eds.), *Reading Opera* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1-11.

<sup>11</sup> Abbate & Parker (eds.), 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Levin (ed.), *Opera Through Other Eyes* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 16.

The 'signifier', which by definition is material and perceptible, must be determined first and may then lead to the 'signified', which is conceptual and intelligible. To start from the latter is a most dangerous procedure.<sup>13</sup>

But Noske's view of the primacy of music in opera was going out of fashion, and Clément, Lindenberger,<sup>14</sup> Abbate and Parker heralded a new wave of opera criticism which, by the importance given to the libretto, invited scholars to rethink the theoretical framework within which opera was examined. Not that views similar to Noske's did not still abound: Paul Robinson suggests in a "deconstructive postscript" to Groos and Parker's collection that

Because the meaning of opera is at bottom musical—because its essential argument is posed in musical language—any interpretation of opera derived exclusively, or even primarily, from the libretto is likely to result in a misreading.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Abbate and Parker guarded against purely textual analysis in opera, subordinating it to musical interpretation by stressing that it should be undertaken only in the service of musicological understanding:

Reading libretti as poetry may well generate an interpretation at odds with the reading imposed by the music. Music can misread words; it can ignore them; its view is not always literate. If we are insensitive to the literary text, we are not in a position to know when music corresponds to words, or responds to words, and when it does not.<sup>16</sup>

However, this did not go far enough for literary critics of opera such as David Levin who pointed out that while musicologists now admitted heterogeneous readings of music in opera, they assumed that the libretto remained homogeneous:

This is an important point, because it complicates a traditional and tidy juxtaposition of opera's signifying systems. For if words are recognised as an erratic player in the interplay of systems, we can no longer simply juxtapose music's ability to emote with language's ability to concretize and refer.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Noske's notion of semantics was completely fractured by Levin. By admitting extra-musical influences to the category of 'signifier', musicologists relied upon the vehicle of the 'signified' being constant. If this notion was undermined through literary criticism, opera studies such as Abbate's, Groos's and Parker's could be seen to hold untenable theoretical positions. Levin, therefore, prescribes a purely literary analysis of opera that presents a certain reading of opera libretti which, for musicians, can appear non-essential. Robinson affirmed:

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<sup>13</sup> Noske, 297.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera. The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, 'A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera', in Groos & Parker (eds.), *Reading Opera*, 328-46, at 328.

<sup>16</sup> Abbate & Parker (eds.), 22, cited Levin (ed.), 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Levin (ed.), 9.

Literary studies of opera hold (so) little interest for musicologists [...]. They may tell us a great deal about literature or about cultural history broadly conceived [...], but so long as they do not speak about music, and about the way words become musical, they are condemned to remain on the periphery of opera.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, should Levin's position be subscribed to by all opera critics, musicologists, who, nevertheless, develop and perpetuate the academic discipline, might shy away from opera, with all the constituent elements, completely.

As Webster's article illustrated, no single analytical system can provide for opera's immense complexity, and everyone is apprehensive about getting their hands dirty with controversial semiotic meanings. Clément's libretto-based study made occasional and controversial forays into musical semantics, often with enlightening results. Indeed, Susan McClary believed that Clément's pioneering work had managed to provide a critical language applicable to other musics. McClary posited that Clément's semantics had helped her to decipher some of the gendered politics in absolute music, and her subsequent *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, looking at both texted and absolute music, drew on the lessons learnt from Clément.<sup>19</sup> Webster complimented the work of Carolyn Abbate as effective due to its sufficiently powerful and general nature as to be applicable to repertoires other than just opera: referring to her writing on narrative in Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, Webster noted that opera is the genre to enlighten discussion of narrative, discourse and rhetoric in absolute music.<sup>20</sup> Abbate herself argued this point, asserting "that marks of musical narrating, as they existed in opera, can be revoiced in instrumental works of the late nineteenth century."<sup>21</sup> Following in Clément's footsteps, Abbate integrated feminist theory, psychoanalytical theory, film theory and philosophical issues into a theoretical synthesis of both positivist and post-structuralist analytical procedures. Using this framework to attempt highly complex readings of opera, Abbate's analyses differ greatly in form and style from

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<sup>18</sup> Robinson, 342.

<sup>19</sup> See McClary's foreword to Clément's book, xiii. McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Abbate, 'Erik's Dream and Tannhäuser's Journey', in Groos & Parker (eds.), 129-67.

<sup>21</sup> Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), xiii.

Webster's models.<sup>22</sup> Rather than quibbling with Clément's controversial semantics, writers such as Abbate have pointed out that:

in focusing on the women's fatal defeat by operatic plots, Clément neglected their triumph: the sound of their singing voices [...], [as] undefeated voice speaks across the crushing plot.<sup>23</sup>

Two differing strains of this line of enquiry emerged: Robinson's polemic converged with Koestenbaum's advocacy of sheer revelry in vocal sound and Michel Poizat's concept of operatic *jouissance*,<sup>24</sup> that to 'read' opera was not just misinterpretation but to miss the point of the aural, oral and visual spectacle of opera altogether. This escape route—music as a refuge from literary criticism—was attacked by Levin and Abbate, the latter taking up the challenge to question the notion of authorial voice in operatic music. Influenced by Edward Cone's 1974 monograph *The Composer's Voice*, Abbate's work is concerned with 'voices' in general, constructing them out of musical discourse and narrative in opera. Incorporating interdisciplinary techniques, Abbate's analyses ask "How does this constructed "they" seem to speak? Why do we hear them? What is their force?", and most importantly for musicologists, "Precisely which musical gestures can be read as portraying their presence?"<sup>25</sup>

Concentration on 'voices' in opera and the cult of the diva combine with feminist operatic biography to reveal another avenue of enquiry. Studies of figures such as Barbara Strozzi<sup>26</sup> and Isabella Andreini<sup>27</sup> were followed by articles examining the way in which certain singers became identified with their favourite role(s). This superimposition of a woman and her operatic character, explored in relation to

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Carolyn Abbate's 'Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women' in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 225-58.

<sup>23</sup> Abbate, 1991, ix. Similar opinions are expressed by Susan McClary, Paul Robinson and Wayne Koestenbaum, the latter in his *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Penguin, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). (Originally published as *L'Opéra, ou le cri de l'ange. Essai sur la jouissance de l'amateur de l'opéra* (Paris: A. M. Métailié, 1986).) See also Poizat's *La Voix du diable. La jouissance lyrique sacrée* (Paris: A. M. Métailié, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Abbate, 1991, xiii.

<sup>26</sup> See the work of Ellen Rosand in Jane Bowers & Judith Tick (eds.), *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition 1150-1950* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 168-90.

<sup>27</sup> Anne MacNeil, 'The Divine Madness of Isabella Andreini', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, CXX, 2, 1995, 195-215.

Rosine Stoltz<sup>28</sup> and Pauline Viardot<sup>29</sup>—a fetishising of singers—is discussed via an innovative synthesis of theoretical and biographical tools to read opera within a given society. Other contextual approaches have emerged. Hervé Lacombe,<sup>30</sup> Anselm Gerhard,<sup>31</sup> and Lesley Wright,<sup>32</sup> all scholars of French opera, place opera firmly within the historical conventions of the genre, whether musical, dramatic, spectacular or social. In this way, their analyses are framed by the contemporary horizon of expectations against which librettists and composers conceived a work and the public received it. This type of study demands sophisticated handling of press materials and a thorough knowledge of operatic conventions over a wide historical period to enable the writer to ‘recreate’ an opera’s original context, the background against which it may be re-evaluated.

A great number of the aforementioned opera studies are confined to the German and Italian repertoires. McClary and Abbate deal with Bizet’s *Carmen* and Delibes’s *Lakmé* respectively, but stock-in-trade opera criticism sticks mainly to Mozart, Verdi, Wagner and, to a lesser extent, Richard Strauss. Another French exception is Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*.<sup>33</sup> Studies of French grand opera in the first half of the nineteenth century have been almost entirely preoccupied with cultural, historical and social context, due in large part to the politicised nature of the Opéra, as described by Jane Fulcher,<sup>34</sup> and perhaps also due to narrow appreciations of the

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Smart, ‘The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz’, in Corinne E. Blackmer & Patricia Juliana Smith (eds.), *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169-89.

<sup>29</sup> Rebecca A. Pope, ‘The diva doesn’t die: George Eliot’s *Armgart*’, in Lesley C. Dunn & Nancy A. Jones (eds.), *Embodied voices: Representing female vocality in western culture*, New perspectives in music history and criticism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 139-51; Wendy Bashant, ‘Singing in Greek Drag: Gluck, Berlioz, George Eliot’, in Blackmer & Smith (eds.), *En Travesti*, 216-41.

<sup>30</sup> Lacombe, *Les voies de l’opéra français au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera. Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Mary Whittall (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). (Originally published as *Die Verstädterung der Oper: Paris und das Musiktheater des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1992).)

<sup>32</sup> Lesley A. Wright, ‘Bizet et ses contemporains à l’Opéra-Comique’, paper given during the session ‘Un genre dans tous ses états’ at the *Colloque musicologique: L’Opéra-Comique de 1801-1918: Regards sur une institution et son répertoire*, Opéra-Comique, Paris, November 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Debussy’s opera is Kerman’s only French example (140-57). Identified as the one exception to his golden rule (that music, not text, generates dramatic action in opera), the work commands Kerman’s attention. As Debussy almost faithfully set Maeterlinck’s drama, Kerman affirms that *Pelléas et Mélisande* thus allows for a separate reading of the libretto before approaching the music, for it is only in this thus ultimately undramatic and unsuccessful opera that the libretto commands the dramatic articulation.

<sup>34</sup> Fulcher, *The Nation’s Image*.

value of the music.<sup>35</sup> Nineteenth-century French repertoire, whether opera or orchestral music, has always been marginalised in Germanic, canonic terms. Despite the world renown of Parisian musical life and opera houses during the nineteenth century, French opera, with its pervasive traditions and conventions, born of social and historical events and regimes and its infamously influential but inattentive public, has tended to be dismissed as a second-class citizen in the operatic hierarchy. The somewhat hybrid and eclectic nature of the genre may also account for its lesser position in canonical stakes.

Work on French opera has blossomed and multiplied during the last ten years, and hence the range and breadth of secondary sources available informs and enriches my own study. As the rigidly delineated formal expectations of *opéra* and *opéra comique* became blurred during the second half of the century, French opera, despite the overwhelming presence of Wagner, seemed to gain in status: the Opéra gained kudos by staging a high-class international repertoire, including works by French composers as well as the French premières of certain Wagner and Verdi operas whilst, by the turn of the century, the Opéra-Comique was fast making its name as the home of the national avant-garde.<sup>36</sup> Current French opera criticism thus reflects a renewed interest in works from the second half of the century, and publications discussing the operas of Gounod,<sup>37</sup> Bizet,<sup>38</sup> Saint-Saëns,<sup>39</sup> Massenet,<sup>40</sup> Chausson,<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Steven Huebner, 'Italianate Duets in Meyerbeer's Grand Operas', in *Journal of Musicological Research*, 8, 1989, 203-58, at 203; id., Review of Anselm Gerhard's *Die Verstädterung der Oper: Paris und das Musiktheater des 19. Jahrhunderts*, in *19th-Century Music*, 18, 1994, 168-74, at 173.

<sup>36</sup> André Michael Spies, *Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic 1875-1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 94-5.

<sup>37</sup> Huebner, *The Operas of Charles Gounod* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Nelly Furman, 'The Languages of Love in *Carmen*', in Groos & Parker (eds.), *Reading Opera*, 168-83; Huebner, 'Carmen as *corrida de toros*', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 13, 1993, 3-29; Lacombe (ed.), *Georges Bizet. Les Pêcheurs de Perles. Dossier de presse parisienne (1863)* (Heilbronn: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 1996); McClary, *Georges Bizet. Carmen*, Cambridge Opera Handbook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, III, 3, 1991, 261-302. See also the work of Yves Gérard.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Christophe Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet ou le crépuscule de l'opéra-comique* (Metz, Editions Serpenoise, 1999); Gérard Condé, 'Commentaire musical et littéraire', in all *Avant-Scène Opéra* on Massenet's operas for analytical commentaries of Massenet's harmonic language. Sieghart Döhring, 'Wagner-Aneignungen: Massenets *Esclarmonde*', in Annegret Fauser & Manuela Schwarz (eds.), *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: Musik, Literatur, Kunst, Politik* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999); Fauser, 'Esclarmonde, un opéra wagnérien?', in *Avant Scène Opéra: Massenet Esclarmonde/Grisélidis*, 148, October 1992, 68-73; Patrick Gillis, 'Thaïs à l'Opéra: Du roman à la comédie lyrique, pertes et profits', in Marie-Claire Bancquart & Jean Dérens (eds.), *Anatole France: Humanisme et Actualité* (Paris, Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, 1994), 107-34; id., 'Thaïs dans tous ses états: genèse et remaniements', in *Avant Scène Opéra: Massenet*

Bruneau and Charpentier<sup>42</sup> complement the staple grand opera diet of Auber and Meyerbeer.<sup>43</sup> Methodological procedures and theoretical frameworks for all of these studies represent the range of modern styles that glean and synthesize the techniques used by previous analysts of opera. It is in this vein that my study contributes to French opera criticism and, particularly, to that of Massenet's operas.

My study begins with an examination of the source materials that formed the basis of social, political, philosophical, Catholic and moral debate during the Third Republic, particularly regarding the position of women in society. The seeds of many republican ideals were sown during the Enlightenment, and to some extent blossomed during the Revolution, which first questioned the place of religion in society and its viability to provide a fundamental moral system for modern society. Through the course of the nineteenth century, this concept was further underpinned by scientific advance which, together with positivist philosophy, laid the groundwork for the French secular society of the twentieth century. Secularisation of society went hand in hand with anticlericalism and a deep-seated republican fear of the Church's influence over women, who were generally perceived as faithful to the Church and its priests due to their nature and education. And yet these two 'enemy camps'—republicanism and Catholicism—advocated similar models of female conduct, and particularly glorified motherhood as woman's natural salvation and glorious destiny. Marianne and Mary were supposedly symbols of opposed ideologies but in practice, they were closely related female symbols of patriarchy. Indeed, by insisting on

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*Thaïs*, 109, May 1988, 66-74; Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Hugh Macdonald, 'Massenet's Craftmanship', in Joël-Marie Fauquet (ed.), *Musiques, Signes, Images: Liber amicorum François Lesure* (Genève: Minkoff, 1988), 183-90; id., "'Passez-vous donc du Diable, que Diable!'", in *Avant Scène Opéra: Massenet Esclarmonde/Grisélidis*, 148, October 1992, 120-5; Clair Rowden (ed.), *Jules Massenet. Thaïs. Dossier de presse parisienne (1894)* (Heilbronn: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Fauser, 'Die Sehnsucht nach dem Mittelalter: Ernest Chausson und Richard Wagner', in Wolfgang Storch & Josef Mackert (eds.), *Les Symbolistes et Richard Wagner* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1991), 115-20; Huebner, 'A Tryst in Ernest Chausson's *Le Roi Arthur*', in Fauser & Schwarz (eds.), *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme*.

<sup>42</sup> Fulcher, 'Charpentier's Operatic "Roman Musical" as read in the Wake of the Dreyfus Affair', in *19th-Century Music*, 16, 2, 1992, 161-80; Huebner, 'Between Anarchism and the Box Office: Gustave Charpentier's *Louise*', in *19th-Century Music*, 19, 2, 1995, 136-60; Manfred Kelkel, *Naturalisme, Vérisme et Réalisme dans l'Opéra de 1890 à 1930* (Paris: Vrin, 1984) discusses the work of both Bruneau and Charpentier. Mary Ellen Poole, 'Gustave Charpentier and the Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson', in *19th-Century Music*, 20, 3, Spring 1997, 231-52.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Everist, 'Giacomo Meyerbeer, the Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon, and Music Drama in Restoration Paris', in *19th-Century Music*, 17, 2, Fall 1993, 124-48. See particularly Anselm Gerhard's monograph as well as the work of Sieghart Döhring and Sabine Henze-Döhring.



women's 'natural' differences, the doctrine of separate spheres of activity for men and women was created, and women were barred from public life but given the home in which to shine as wife, mother and patriotic educator of children. But from the late 1850s onwards, women's voices began to be raised in anger over their relegation to the position of second-class human being and citizen, and the bourgeois feminist movement was born. With the change of regime in 1870/1 came a renewal of republican ideals which by no means improved the status of women, either ideologically or materially. Thus feminist pressure groups and activists fought for every legal reform for women including the right to state education, to divorce, and to vote. However, the changing face of gender politics witnessed by the emergence of increasingly emancipated women was rarely appreciated by the male power base concerned with retaining its position, with national demographic figures, decadence and emasculation. By painting a general overview of this period, I provide the backdrop of social, political and moral debate against which Massenet's operas were played, perceived and received. This historical study is necessary for the subsequent readings of the operas, my interpretations of the text and the music, thereby recreating the horizon of expectations of nineteenth-century audiences.

In trying to trace social, moral and political currents (particularly in relation to women, their status in society and how their position was perceived) which intersect with Massenet's operas, I have chosen two case studies: *Hérodiade* (1881) and *Thaïs* (1894). These two operas frame an almost fifteen-year period of republican stability following the attempted monarchist coup of 1877 and preceding the Dreyfus affair and the emergence of the nationalist far right in the last few years of the century. This period was, however, one of cultural change as the positivist philosophical tenets on which scientific, republican society was based began to be undermined by a sense of social decline, and the ideological schism between the Church and liberal republicans began to be bridged via the mystic revival and conciliatory Catholic social policy (*Ralliement*), in spite of the Republic's increasing laicisation of its institutions. The operas bear witness to an evolution of women's portrayal from the stereotypical anticlerical image of the devout woman in contrast to the wanton who lives outside of society's norms (*Hérodiade*), to the sensual but inspired prostitute and mystical ecstatic (*Thaïs*). The critics' perception and reception of these dramatic characters is also seen to evolve as the growing female emancipation movement

inspired knee-jerk reactions among the male establishment concerned by women's invasion of public society and the protection of its own privileges.<sup>44</sup>

*Hérodiade*  
Dramatis Personae & Synopsis<sup>45</sup>

<b>Salomé</b>	Dancer and courtesan at Antipas court; daughter of Hérodiade but unaware of her parentage.
<b>Jean</b>	John the Baptist; prophet and orator who strays from his religious vocation by giving in to his love for Salomé.
<b>Hérode</b>	Tetrarch of Galilee; in love with the courtesan Salomé.
<b>Hérodiade</b>	Second wife of Hérode; mother of Salomé, although unaware that Salomé is the child whom she abandoned for an incestuous union with her brother-in-law, Hérode.
<b>Phanuel</b>	Courtly adviser, diplomat and soothsayer who expounds evangelic values; knows Salomé's and Hérodiade's identities.
<b>Vitellius</b>	Magnanimous Roman proconsul on state visit to the Antipas court.

Hérode hopes to ally the Jews to his plan to overthrow Roman oppression. Hérodiade calls for the execution of Jean Baptiste but Hérode is unwilling to order it. The couple flee before Jean's calumny of them. Hérode is infatuated with Salomé who declares her love for Jean, by whom she is gently rebuffed.

Hérode takes a love potion and erotically dreams of Salomé. The people assemble to declare their allegiance to Hérode's plans for revolt against the Romans. Vitellius arrives, grants the Jews their religious claims, and proclaims Roman authority, to which the Jews swear allegiance. Jean and his Canaanite women followers enter proclaiming heavenly justice; Jean is arrested.

Phanuel divines Jean's identity. Hérodiade enters and demands to know the identity of her rival for Hérode's affections. Phanuel reminds Hérodiade of the child she abandoned and shows that child, and her rival, to be Salomé. Hérode declares his love to Salomé but is violently rejected. The Jews reconsecrate the Temple. Jean is judged by Hérode. As the High Priests call for Jean's crucifixion, Salomé publicly declares her will to die as a martyr alongside Jean. Hérode, realising that Salomé is in love with Jean, condemns them both to death.

Jean, imprisoned, muses on Salomé who soon joins him, and Jean declares his love for her. The lovers are separated; Jean is sent to his execution and Salomé to Hérode. She implores the dignitaries to spare Jean's life, turning to Hérodiade as a fellow woman. But the executioner arrives with a bloodied sword, and Salomé rushes at Hérodiade with a dagger. The latter admits to being Salomé's mother, at which news, Salomé turns the dagger on herself and dies in Hérode's arms.

<sup>44</sup> Public perception, as distinct from critical reception, is much harder to gauge, although a work's popularity among the music-making public may be measured to some degree by the production and sale of sheet music of separate arias, choruses etc., including transcriptions for different musical formations. This tool for evaluation does not address, however, the whole of an opera's public, nor deals explicitly with ideology, being based on the popularity of the music itself.

*Thaïs*  
Dramatis Personae & Synopsis<sup>46</sup>

<b>Thaïs</b>	Alexandrine courtesan and priestess of Venus.
<b>Athanaël</b>	Cenobite monk.
<b>Nicias</b>	Rich, decadent, sceptic philosopher, currently Thaïs's lover.
<b>Albine</b>	Mother superior of Thaïs's convent retreat.

Following a vision, Athanaël, an ascetic and hermitic monk, leaves the desert in order to convert the Alexandrine courtesan Thaïs. Athanaël asks aid of a childhood friend Nicias, who introduces him into Alexandrine society as well as his lover Thaïs.

In a private interview with Thaïs, Athanaël tries to convert her to his Holy doctrine. Although Thaïs sends him away, Athanaël spends the night on her doorstep during which the *Méditation religieuse* is played. The following morning, a converted Thaïs leaves with Athanaël to cross the desert for a convent retreat where Thaïs will spend the rest of her days.

Athanaël, having delivered Thaïs into the hands of the Mother Albine, returns to his own desert community but is tormented by concupiscent visions of Thaïs. Learning of Thaïs's failing health in another vision, Athanaël wildly sets out for the convent, condemning his God and his faith. On arriving at the convent, Thaïs is near death. Athanaël declares his love and carnal desire for Thaïs. Thaïs dies beatified in sublime ignorance of Athanaël's blasphemy.

These two operas have a number of common factors: first, both are based on early Christian stories and entail the failing of a male saint; second, both set tales which were well-known to contemporary audiences, whether via ancient versions or modern retellings; third, both operas were premièred in versions which differ from the definitive score known to modern audiences. The dramatic staging of Christian history in *Thaïs*, and particularly in *Hérodiade*, allows for a brief review of this practice and its social acceptability, noting the critical reaction and opinion when religion (and its perversion) became a contemporary cultural product. Moreover, such operas provide an opportunity to judge how republican communities (whether lay, anticlerical, Catholic, artistic etc.) perceived religion, the Church's representatives and the clergy's relationship with women. Examination of not only the choice of subject matter for an opera but also the adaptation of its libretto from earlier sources can provide insight into the messages an opera's authorial team

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<sup>45</sup> A full synopsis of the *Hérodiade* is given in Appendix 3 due to the large number of characters involved in this grand opera and its complicated plot comprising the different histories of the numerous protagonists.

wished to convey. The referential framework against which the story of *Hérodiade* was received was the original bible tale of John the Baptist (with all its Catholic moral import) and the 'refinements' added to the legend by positivist theologians such as Ernest Renan.<sup>47</sup> *Thaïs*, on the other hand, was a direct adaptation of Anatole France's 1890 novel, and even though the philosophical element of France's tale was whittled down to almost nothing in the libretto, the scenographic and musical translation of the story retains a similar aesthetic ideal to that of the original literary version.<sup>48</sup> France's novel was widely read, and many critics of the opera believed it impossible for operagoers not to have read the book; the five-year gap between the serialised publication of *Thaïs* in the *Revue des deux mondes* (1889) and the opera's première meant that critics and public alike could appreciate the opera in the light of France's original and its reception only a few years before.<sup>49</sup> In this way, both operas were conceived and received within particular (if not exceptional) cultural contexts which informed public opinion, and which in turn provides the historian with another layer of complexity when interpreting their reception. Reception history of the opera's première is important with both *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs* as both operas were subsequently reworked by the composer [See Appendices 1 & 2.]. Although musical and scenographic materials exist for the original 'texts',<sup>50</sup> study of the opera's reception, both *Wirkung* and *Rezeption*, promises to provide crucial information about 'lost' elements of a work, particularly in the case of *Thaïs* where a programmatic symphonic interlude and pantomimic ballet were cut, and about the aesthetic and social context in which it was received and evaluated.<sup>51</sup> At the same

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<sup>46</sup> No full synopsis is given for *Thaïs* as the plot of this 'comédie lyrique', of modest scale with only two main protagonists, is essentially contained here.

<sup>47</sup> Gustave Flaubert's *Hérodias* was published in 1877, although Massenet's opera is only very loosely based on his tale and does not pretend (in its title) to derive its inspiration from Flaubert, even if his novel does indeed seem to have been the generative force of the libretto.

<sup>48</sup> Indeed, as Flaubert's *Hérodias* and France's *Thaïs* share certain traits of the decadent literary movement, Flaubert's novel can be seen to have had a greater impact on the opera *Thaïs* than on Massenet's earlier opera.

<sup>49</sup> See Albert Gier, 'Thaïs: Ein Roman von Anatole France und eine Oper von Jules Massenet', in Erich Köhler & Hennig Krauss (eds.), *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, Sonderdruck Heft 2/3, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1981), 232-56.

<sup>50</sup> Printed staging books were published and made available, along with musical materials, to provincial opera houses which wished to mount the operas after the fashion of the première or of the Paris Opéra.

<sup>51</sup> See Mark Everist's discussion of this subdivision of reception history outlined by Carl Dahlhaus (*Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*, 1977) and redefined by Robert C. Holub (*Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, 1984) in his 'Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value', in Nicholas Cook & Mark Everist (eds.), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 378-402, at 379-80.

time, examination of the differences between two versions of the same score can provide insight into a work's dramatic structure.

During the 1880s and early 1890s, Massenet, then in his forties, was at the height of his operatic career. In the thirteen-year period between the premières of *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs*, Massenet saw five other of his operas produced in Paris's two national, subsidised theatres alone, including not only the prestigious *Esclarmonde*, the official work of the 1889 Exposition Universelle, but also those two operas which have most prominently remained in the repertoire and the hearts of opera-lovers throughout the twentieth century, *Manon* and *Werther*. Whilst his *œuvre* today is often reduced to these few titles, Massenet's high-profile career spanned forty years and produced some twenty-five operas. Although Massenet did not possess the same political or ideological presence of a Verdi or a Wagner (Verdi and Wagner, born the same year, 1813, were by nearly thirty years Massenet's senior), his musical presence in Paris, France and in Europe was comparable, as that of the leading French operatic composer of his time. To look at his operas through the optic of their social, moral, political, literary, musical and theatrical context, therefore, can inform the reader of not only Massenet's understanding of his own position and his art, but also, with opera as the mirror of society, of the social picture in *fin-de-siècle* France.

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Rueil Malmaison, July 2001

## Chapter One

### *Marianne and Mary*

The 'woman question' in modern France was born out of the Revolution of 1789. Its republicans professed the universal rights of individuals. Yet at the same time, the universal 'truth' of sexual difference was prized above the rights of the individual and led to the political exclusion of women.<sup>1</sup> The autonomous individual was thus identified as male with the female as its complementary 'other', necessary for his identification.<sup>2</sup> This 'natural' division of the sexes was applied to the social context, creating the doctrine of separate spheres for men and women in which women's sphere of activity was viewed as 'naturally' different from men's.<sup>3</sup> Despite Condorcet's far-reaching ideas on women and his proposals for the reform of their education,<sup>4</sup> or the campaigning for women's rights by figures such as Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), women's sexual difference excluded them from the public domain of the new Republic, thus depriving them of the necessary individuality to accede to citizenship.<sup>5</sup> The concept of naturally delineated separate spheres had prevailed in France from the Enlightenment when society began to be considered in terms of reason (rather than superstition) and natural laws (as opposed to cultural constraints).<sup>6</sup> Biology was indicated as destiny, and sexual difference predetermined the existence of a sexual division of labour and thus separate social roles for men and women. These essentialist arguments were reinforced by the law; first the 1791 Constitution and then the 1804 Napoleonic Civil code deprived women of a political role—the vote—and reinforced the patriarchal hierarchy of the family by attributing

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<sup>1</sup> Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 105; Joan W. Scott, *La Citoyenne paradoxale: Les féministes françaises et les droits de l'homme*, trans. Marie Bourdè and Colette Pratt (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 9-13. Originally published as *Only Paradoxes to Offer* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996), although I have only read, and possess, this monograph in its French translation, to which version all footnote citations refer.

<sup>2</sup> Scott, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Landes, 112-7; James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 16-7.

<sup>5</sup> For details of Olympe de Gouges's feminist actions see Scott, 39-88.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Offen, 'Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of "Equality in Difference" for Women: A Case Study of Male Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Thought', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (June 1986), 452-84, at 460. Offen affirms that natural-rights arguments in France were invariably qualified by the social implication of sexual difference, and refers her readers to Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) and Diderot's *Sur les femmes* (1773).

married woman the status of a minor, thereby making her become the property of her husband, like her children. Women were thus confined to the role of wife and mother: woman's role was defined and even glorified through her ability to give birth and educate children within the private realm of the family home. Unmarried women were barely considered, although they could be incorporated into this ideology for women by fulfilling a serving and caring role within society as nuns, nurses and governesses.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the nineteenth century, further reasons were given for women's political exclusion, most notably the opposing notions of woman as either fanatical revolutionary or Catholic counter-revolutionary. These two figures of women hostile to republican ideas were immortalised by Jules Michelet in his *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847-53) and *Le Prêtre, la femme et la famille* (1845). Michelet's works were influential, *Le Prêtre* going through eight editions before 1875 and becoming a quasi-seminal text of anticlerical Third-Republican thinking on the association of women and the Church.<sup>8</sup> And yet Michelet's women were not complete inventions, for the Revolution had seen a political intervention by women of all classes that went beyond all previous experience. In particular, the militant *sans-culottes* were an important Jacobin ally in the struggle with the Girondins for control of the National Assembly in May 1793. But having got rid of their political opponents, the Jacobins no longer needed *sans-culotte* support and less than six months later, all women's Revolutionary clubs and associations were banned.<sup>9</sup> As the

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<sup>7</sup> The ideal of motherhood for women was so strong that in 1898, Anna Lampérière, perhaps cynically, referred to unmarried women and widows as abnormal, adding "il n'est pas moins vrai que la femme, étant une individualité libre, doit pouvoir se refuser à l'union familiale sans encourir aucune infériorité théorique: l'infériorité de fait suffit." See Lampérière, *Le Rôle social de la femme. Devoirs – Droits – Education* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1898), 35-6.

<sup>8</sup> Michelet's *Histoire de la Révolution* was re-edited twice during the late 1860s, three times during the 1870s, three times during the 1880s, and remains a seminal historical text on the Revolution. Even in 1907, Clemenceau declared that "the number of women who escape clerical domination is ridiculously small," and that "if the right to vote were given to women tomorrow, France would be thrown back into the dark ages" (Scott, 143). Indeed, female suffrage was voted by the National Assembly in 1919 but rejected by the Senate in 1922 for fear of clerical domination of women, so deeply were Michelet's ideas embedded in the male Republican political conscience. (See McMillan, 217-8.) Whilst this idea remained the prevalent argument against granting women the vote, it also served to assimilate the concepts of masculinity and laicity, scientific reason and independent reflection, i.e. all the apt conditions for citizenship within the Republic. (See Scott, 143.)

<sup>9</sup> Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, The Donald G. Creighton Lectures 1989 (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 21-39; McMillan, 22-5.

Jacobins considered all political opposition hostile to the Republic, so women were deemed to embody the opposite of male virtue; the consolidation of Jacobin power thus included a tightening of the links between law, order and sexual difference.<sup>10</sup> Male virtue, for Robespierre, was the fundamental principle of democratic government, and everything contrary to virtue was quickly repressed under what became known as the *Terreur*.<sup>11</sup> The image of women who decided to act as political citizens when the law, based on the natural difference of the sexes, denied them that possibility, was perpetuated in nineteenth-century histories of the Revolution: they were bloodthirsty, unnatural women who, by crossing the natural boundaries of their sphere of activity, rendered themselves monstrous and, perhaps more importantly, jeopardised republican stability. All successive groups of women activists lived with the collective memory of the *sans-culottes* and were judged accordingly.<sup>12</sup>

The other group which served to justify women's political exclusion were the Catholics, identified as counter-revolutionaries. Perceived as abject slaves of the Church, women were equated with faith and superstition rather than knowledge and reasoning and were therefore seen as enemies of the Enlightenment on whose humanist ideals the Revolution and ensuing Republic were based.<sup>13</sup> Republican governments throughout the nineteenth century were wary of clerical influence over women, the Church being bound, under the Ancien Regime, to the absolute monarchy, thus constituting a considerable right-wing monarchist force which could endanger political stability. Women were seen to be influenced by their education which was traditionally directed by the clergy and, more particularly, through the confessional. Catholic counter-revolutionaries' fanaticism was seen to be as dangerous as that of the militant revolutionary women for as non-citizens, all women activists were barred from the use of legal methods of protest—petition, the vote—to put pressure on the authorities, and so Catholic women also turned to illegal forms of militant action.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the counter-revolutionary woman remained the stronger

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<sup>10</sup> Scott, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Scott, 77-8.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, 141-2. The 'pétroleuses' were the corresponding group of women portrayed as irrationally violent during the Paris Commune. See also McMillan, 134-5.

<sup>13</sup> McMillan, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 198-9.



symbol, for her putative control of the private world of the home and family threatened the flowering of the rational state, the new Eden. As in the doctrine of original sin, a hysterical, perverse, irrational and unreliable woman was constructed to explain why man had been kept from earthly paradise.<sup>15</sup>

These two opposing images of women as either clerical devotee and counter-revolutionary or emancipated political activist will be explored in the following chapter in relation to the characters of Salomé and Hérodiade (respectively) in Massenet's opera *Hérodiade*. Yet, these two groups of women represented two sides of the same coin: both Marianne and Mary were seen to be subject to influences outside the sphere of rationality of which all women were commonly deemed incapable.<sup>16</sup> In order to neutralise the power of these female figures, perceived as dangerous to society, both were idealised and invested with the qualities to which women and the nation should aspire. Under republican regimes, Marianne was represented as an active warrior-like figure crusading for Revolutionary freedom, designated by her red Phrygian cap; or alternatively she was portrayed as an immobile woman accompanied by didactic allegories of reason, law and the constitution.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Marianne embodied the virtues desired by the new order; she was an abstract representation of reason, liberty and justice, the fundamental concepts on which the Republic was based. But as the Republic excluded women from the category of human individual and citizen, the female Marianne was nevertheless an emblem of male power and authority.<sup>18</sup> Yet still Marianne remained a potent image and role-model for revolutionary women, borne out by the fact that in 1793, the Jacobins toyed with the idea of replacing the figure of Marianne with that of Hercules, for women were threatening to take Marianne as justification for their own active participation in the Republic.<sup>19</sup> Republicans sought to establish political

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<sup>15</sup> Hufton, 154.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, 144. Hufton (101) describes how the depiction of 'irrational woman' has been present throughout history, from Greek medical treatises to the Enlightenment woman immersed in nature and viewed as a creation of her reproductive organs.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolisme républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 31, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt, 104. The proposed engraving of Hercules by Dupré rehabilitated a virile representation of sovereignty with connotations of domination and supremacy but without the idea of patriarchy contained into royalist imagery. Liberty and equality, represented as women, were held in the palm of

and cultural legitimacy through the use of symbols and at the same time challenge the hold of Catholicism. Thus the secular Marianne, associated with liberty and reason, was opposable to the Virgin Mary.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, like Republicans, Catholics too sought to legitimise their beliefs through a female symbol.<sup>21</sup> Marianism, throughout the centuries, had defined modes of behaviour appropriate for women. In the Middle Ages, the adoration of the Virgin and the teachings of humility of Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi created a climate in which Mary, humanised, was brought down off her pedestal but held up as the prime example of a humble and obedient wife and mother.<sup>22</sup> The subsequent interweaving of the religious ethic into the social fabric transferred the values advocated for the convent into the home. Marian virtues were thus interpreted along social not spiritual lines and were turned into a recipe for 'feminine' qualities: humility, modesty, innocence and obedience.<sup>23</sup> So, like Marianne, Mary also embodied a representation of patriarchal power and authority. And yet, like republican women who appropriated Marianne as a symbol of their struggle for existence, so the cult of Mary was strongest among women who could identify with a woman who knew human suffering and, most importantly, who was prepared to mediate with God on behalf of women through the manipulation of her son.<sup>24</sup>

### The Cult of Republican Motherhood

Rousseau's argument for the creation of separate spheres for men and women, based on natural difference, also yoked women to the function of serving the state. Woman's duty as a wife and mother thus involved the subordination of her independent aims and interests to a higher goal: the ethical life of the community. But unlike man, of whom Rousseau also demanded the sublimation of particular interests on behalf of the public good, woman was barred completely from active

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Hercules's hand, Hercules's monumental enormity putting women's position of dependency into perspective. Hunt (115) also affirms that the symbol of Hercules faded after 1799. Marianne did not disappear but was overshadowed by representations of Bonaparte himself, Marianne only resurfacing with subsequent republics.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, 63. Hunt (93) believes that Catholicism made the French more receptive to the Marian figure of Marianne.

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Viking, 1999), 222, 247.

<sup>22</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1976, rpt. 1990), 179.

<sup>23</sup> Warner, 184-7.

<sup>24</sup> Hufton, 108.

participation in the sphere which gave purpose to all her actions.<sup>25</sup> Rousseau not only outlined how the family was essential to achieving social order—love and morality in the family fostered love of a moral state—but also how the size of the population and the rate of its increase were signifiers of its moral virtue, vitality and good government.<sup>26</sup> The idea of Republican motherhood was posited from 1791 onwards, very much along Rousseau's lines. Woman's major political task was seen to be the instilling of patriotic duty in her children: the home was the nursery of the state. Thus gaining a worthy civic role and purpose, women accompanied their duty with the claim for improvements in their education and legal situation in order to extend their limited horizons and wholly self-orientated concerns to embrace a larger polity but in a passive, not active, manner.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the ideology of republican motherhood was also, at this juncture, a feminist one which responded to the strict misogyny of that of separate spheres of home and state for women and men, and managed to some extent to subvert the sexual system from within.<sup>28</sup>

But the issues surrounding the debate over republican motherhood were present throughout the nineteenth century in France and always returned to prominence at moments of political crisis when attempts were inevitably made to (re)define women's role in society. The historical focus of this study is the Third Republic, declared on 4 September 1870 following the defeat of Napoléon III's Second Empire by the Prussians. After Napoléon fell at Sedan, Prussian troops marched on Paris, subjecting the capital and its population to a humiliating siege. The tumultuous popular uprising and civil unrest of the Paris Commune followed the capitulation, and was finally devastatingly and bloodily quelled by the army under the direction of the new National Assembly, headed by Adolphe Thiers from Versailles. In the wake of Bismarck's conquest, the notion of *patrie* was of vital importance to create a strong nation that took pride in its achievements rather than dwelling on its mistakes. Combined with the general debate over women's issues, a distinct Republican and anticlerical strategy developed along Rousseau's lines in order to achieve strong

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<sup>25</sup> Landes, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Landes, 85-6.

<sup>27</sup> Landes, 129-38.

patriotic pride: strengthening of the family unit by woman's *limited* social, intellectual and political emancipation and her secularisation. The 'traditional' differences in men's and women's education were seen to have created a rupture in the family. Having little in common with their wives, men spent less and less time in the marital home. Even when they did spend time together, Republican commentators noted, man's religious indifference and woman's religiously-educated and, therefore, narrow-minded and anti-progressive spirit could not be reconciled.<sup>29</sup> For Republicans, the limiting of the Church's influence over women by improving and secularising their education could help to bridge the gender gap within the family. Hence, a revitalised family unit via a more equal education for men and women was the first step to the regeneration of society. Strong, pure family morals, fraternal love and duty within the home would strengthen the same values in society, and the nation's patriotic pride, greatness and future were assured.<sup>30</sup>

The Church also revised and modernised its opinion of women's right to education, particularly through the writings of the highly influential Bishop of Orléans, Monseigneur Dupanloup, and thereby arrived at a similar, but religiously-based, formula for women's future.<sup>31</sup> Encouraging the cult of expiation of the sins which brought about French defeat in 1870, the Church stood for many of the same ideals as the Republic, most notably moral order, paternal authority and wifely obedience and duty.<sup>32</sup> Thus whilst different allegiances polarised the Church and the state, moralists of all persuasions extolled the virtues of motherhood and wifely duty for women. By the 1870s, therefore, the cult of republican motherhood had been appropriated by the male establishment as an excellent way of maintaining the subordination of women in a growing emancipatory climate.

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<sup>28</sup> Karen Offen, 'Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France', *The American Historical Review*, 89, June 1984, 648-76, at 675, which views republican motherhood in a Third-Republican context.

<sup>29</sup> Léon Richer, *Lettres d'un libre penseur à un curé de campagne*, Première Série (Paris: A. Le Chevalier, 1868), 220-5.

<sup>30</sup> Funck-Brentano, cited in Marie Dugard, *La culture morale. Lectures de morale théorique et pratique choisies et annotées* (Paris: A. Colin, 1892), 165.

<sup>31</sup> For brief biographical details of Mgr. Dupanloup, see Mona Ozouf, *L'Ecole, l'Eglise et la République 1871-1914* (Paris: Editions Cana/Jean Offredo, Collection Seuil Points Histoire, 1982), 16. Originally published by Armand Colin, Collection Kiosque, 1963.

<sup>32</sup> Hufton, 143; Ozouf, 21-4.

Whilst before 1870 Marianne and Mary had been seen as emblematic figures of opposing parties, the cult of the republican mother drew the two symbols together, for they were seen to be born of the same ideal of married woman as a pure, intelligent and generative force in the creation of a harmonious patriarchal society. At the start of the 1880s, when the Third Republic had become firmly established, Marianne increasingly became a figure of Mother Nature,<sup>33</sup> evolving from being the symbol of one party or regime to becoming that of the nation.<sup>34</sup> This transition was achieved through an equation of Marianne and motherhood more commonly associated with Marianne's opposite and complementary symbol, the Virgin Mary. This fusion of the two figures can be seen to be almost complete in *Fécondité* (1899), the first of Emile Zola's cycle *Les Evangiles*. Zola's heroine, Marianne, gives birth to twelve healthy children and is adored in her motherhood by her husband Mathieu (who has three brothers called Marc, Luc and Jean) as the Virgin Mary was worshipped by her followers.<sup>35</sup> But in his equation of the cult of motherhood and the cult of the Virgin, the rationalist Zola chose to glorify a pantheistic religion rather than the Catholic one, and in opposition to the female symbol of Catholicism, he chose to call his female symbol of optimistic neo-paganism Marianne.<sup>36</sup> However, like the cult of the Virgin within the Church which highlighted Mary's sexual difference and thus subordination as the mother of God, Zola's cult of motherhood, written in a literary form purposely designed to echo the Gospels, served to reinforce and applaud a new republican patriarchy.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, through the cult of the Virgin and aspiration to Virginal purity, married women were rehabilitated within both the Church and republican society from sexually dangerous Eve-like figures responsible for the fall of man, to spiritually and morally

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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'Imagerie et la Symbolique républicaine de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 262. This image of a fertile woman endowed with creative powers was an impossible one before the end of the nineteenth century due to the widely held belief, popularised as late as 1858 by Pierre Joseph Proudhon and examined later, that women were purely receptacles for male 'seeds', whether physical, moral or intellectual.

<sup>34</sup> Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 176-8.

<sup>35</sup> Agulhon, 1989, 183.

<sup>36</sup> Agulhon (1989, 300) cites from the Belgian socialist Henri de Man's 1929 monograph *Au delà du marxisme* in which he affirms that the adoration of Marianne was the direct correlation to the cult of the Virgin.

<sup>37</sup> Offen, 1984, 663-4.

superior beings.<sup>38</sup> In the wake of the 1848 revolutions, Marianism was given new impetus by Pius IX's bull *Ineffabilis Deus* promulgating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, a declaration perceived as an act of defiance against rationalism and scepticism.<sup>39</sup> Thereafter, Pius IX became identified as the defender of religion against revolution, liberalism and socialism. Moreover, the dogma was later deliberately promoted by Louis Veuillot and the Assumptionist Father d'Alzon in the face of nineteenth-century science as provocation to rationalist Republicans.<sup>40</sup> And yet, as the image of the Virgin wielded by such men of the Church was not so far removed from that of the idealised bourgeois woman, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception may be perceived as less purely reactionary and more in step with the larger ideological preoccupations about the moral and domestic role of women in nineteenth-century society.<sup>41</sup>

The condition and image of women in society during the second half of the nineteenth century is dealt with in this chapter, along with other social, religious and moral issues hotly debated from the Second Republic onwards. The arguments

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<sup>38</sup> McMillan, 51, 97. Eve was actually reinstated as a mother figure by the feminist campaigner Jeanne Deroin. During the Second Republic, Deroin argued for the image of Eve as the original mother of all humanity rather than the temptress of the fall, believing defamation of Eve to be the result of the devalorisation of maternity. Deroin based her claims for female suffrage on the figure of an idealised mother, an individual in full possession of herself and her children, even to the extent of negating the male partnership in the production of children in her quest to establish autonomous individuality for women. Indeed, within a strict division of labour, Deroin viewed childbearing as the accomplishment of social duty which merited governmental recognition and recompense equivalent to that shown to men under universal suffrage, i.e. the vote. See Scott, particularly 103-8.

<sup>39</sup> Harris, 14; Warner, 236-7.

<sup>40</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 1989), 141; Harris, 219-20. The Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes four years after the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. *Aquéro*, as Bernadette called her vision, presented herself as the Immaculate Conception, a phrase which Soubirous credibly denied knowing. The Assumptionist Father d'Alzon was a key player in the organisation of national pilgrimage to Lourdes from 1873 onwards.

<sup>41</sup> Harris, 285. Flaubert lumped both Catholic and republican ideals together in his condemnation of the cult of motherhood. In a letter of 11 January, 1859 to Ernest Feydeau he declared: "Et l'Église (catholique, apostolique et romaine) a fait preuve du plus haut sens en décrétant le dogme de l'Immaculée Conception. Il résume la vie sentimentale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ce pauvre siècle à scrofules et à pâmoisons, qui a en horreur les choses fortes, les solides nourritures et qui se complaît sur les genoux féminins, comme un enfant malade. [...] *Le culte de la mère* sera une des choses qui fera pouffer de rire les générations futures." ["And the Church (Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman) has given proof of the greatest good sense in promulgating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception—it sums up the emotional life of the nineteenth century. Poor, scrofulous, fainting century, with its horror of anything strong, of solid food, its fondness for lying in its mother's lap like a sick child! [...] Our 'cult of the mother' is one of the things that will arouse the laughter of future generations."] See *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert, Tome 13. Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance 1850-1859* (Paris: Club

presented formed the basis of republican thinking for the rest of the century, and returned to prominence during the first decade of the Third Republic, the historical focus of this study, as the new republican regime fought for legitimacy and stability. This chapter thus presents the contextual issues at stake in the following discussion of Massenet's 1881 opera *Hérodiade*, such as the cult of republican motherhood and its influence on the portrayal of the relationship between Salomé and Hérodiade, as well as that of Hérodiade's maternal failings. Through the course of the 1880s, ideological debate evolved, resulting in a new set of concerns which developed organically from the former preoccupations of French society. A brief discussion of these new contextual issues of the *fin de siècle* is presented towards the end of this chapter, and will be developed further in later chapters dealing with both the operas *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs* (1894).

### Religion versus Philosophy and the Place of Religion in Society

The nineteenth century saw enormous advances in critical appreciation, abstract reasoning and scientific research, crowned by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Positivist society drew its fundamental principles from observable and measurable facts, rationalising human existence to the intelligible, the visible and the palpable. Darwin's evolutionary theories radically altered its vision of humanity and created valid 'scientific' doubt over the existence of a divine presence as the source of life's fundamental principles and morality which had previously only been negated by humanist arguments of the Enlightenment regarding the capacity of the human brain. Indeed, the influence of Darwin's evolutionism showed its breadth throughout the second half of the nineteenth century via a preoccupation with the notions of progress and decline of civilisation. A need for regeneration of the nation—be it physical, political, moral or social—was an idea expressed from the start of the 1789 Revolution.<sup>42</sup> The corruption of the Ancien Regime was seen to stem from the triple stigma of its despotism, sacerdotalism and feudalism.<sup>43</sup> Yet whilst the need for regeneration necessarily implied a sense of degeneracy, it was the notion of renewal,

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de l'Honnête homme, 1974), 655. Translation drawn from Francis Steegmuller (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954), 189-90.

<sup>42</sup> 'Régénération' in François Furet & Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française: Idées* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 373-90.

<sup>43</sup> Furet & Ozouf (eds.), 375.

the objective to create a 'new people' which prevailed. Through the course of the nineteenth century, history and progress invariably came to be viewed in linear terms, as an advance from a primitive to a sophisticated state, each generation presenting a refinement of its predecessor.<sup>44</sup> But these notions of progress were finite, and the prevailing view of progress as evolutionary necessarily implied the notion of decline. Indeed, women, their place in society, and their transgression of socially accepted spheres of activity were often regarded as central to the problem of decline and its resolution, which involved the moral regeneration of the family unit.<sup>45</sup> Following Hegelian philosophy and Darwinian theory, the focus of civilisation's evolutionary status was its degeneracy which was repeated like an 'idée fixe' from the 1860s up until and beyond the First World War.

Scientific advance engendered not only the industrial revolution which wrought dramatic changes in society, but also the advancement of positivist philosophy. Indeed, these movements were concurrent and reciprocally stimulating. The industrialisation of France's rural population gave rise to a wave of urbanisation, a new materialism and growing socialism, with it came the changing face of human relationships within both the public and private spheres. With dogged reasoning and newly acquired scientific 'proof' of previously debated or inexplicable phenomena, positivism widened the already unbridgeable divide between religion and philosophy. One of the most prominent positivist intellectuals was, indeed, a former cleric, Ernest Renan. From the 1830s onwards, a wealth of positivistic theological writings across Europe 'relativised' the Christian faith by placing Jesus and his entourage in their historical, theological and geographical context.<sup>46</sup> This emerging academic discipline

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<sup>44</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 213; Jann Pasler, 'Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Late Romantic Era, Man & Music Series* (London: MacMillan, 1991), 389-416, at 389-95.

<sup>45</sup> Offen, 1986, 461.

<sup>46</sup> In the introduction to his *Vie de Jésus*, Renan acknowledges the German preponderance in the field of Evangelical debate, citing the names Baur, Dillmann, Ewald, Hilgenfeld, Hoffmann, Koestlin, Lücke, Schenkel, Scherer, Scholten, Schwalb, Schwegler, Strauss, Volkmar, Weisse, Weizsäcker and Zeller. He goes on to refer his readers to the following works, available in the French language: T. Colani, *Jésus-Christ et les Croyances messianiques de son temps*, Second Edition (Paris: Cherbuliez, 1864); Gustave d'Eichtal, *Les Évangiles*, Première partie: *Examen critique et comparatif des trois premiers Évangiles* (Paris: Hachette, 1863); Michel Nicolas, *Des doctrines religieuses des Juifs pendant les deux siècles antérieurs à l'ère chrétienne* (Paris: Lévy frères, 1860) & *Études critiques sur la Bible (Nouveau Testament)* (Paris: Lévy frères, 1864); Reuss, *Histoire de la théologie*



of comparative theology dealt not only with Christianity but also with other world religions, and particularly those that found their source in the Middle East: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Thus the Christian faith began to be considered as just one religion among many.<sup>47</sup>

This theological and philosophical movement coincided with Western colonial efforts in the Near and Middle East and North Africa which gave unprecedented access to the 'cradle of humanity' for European archeologists, topographers, artists and writers, as Napoléon's Egyptian campaign had done at the turn of the nineteenth century. Such pilgrims of the scientific age believed it important to find the roots of Christianity in a concrete, observable reality.<sup>48</sup> Renan crowned his œuvre to date with his version of the *Vie de Jésus* in 1863, drawing inspiration from David Friedrich Strauss's interpretation of the same subject and relying on recent research carried out by semitic language scholars, including himself. For Renan, nineteenth-century sacerdotalism was everything but the pure expression of Jesus's teachings. The essence and totality of His teachings, according to Renan, was the conception of God as His immediate father and, therefore, the love of God as that of a loving father, comprising patriarchal charity and forgiveness. Anything else within the Christian Church was a betrayal of Jesus's intentions. Renan affirmed that hierarchical dogma could not have been further from Jesus's mind, borne out by his ardent criticism of the pedantry and casuistry of the Jewish Pharisees: His cult was founded on the purity of the heart and human fraternity. However, Renan went a step further,

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*chrétienne au Siècle apostolique* (Second Edition; Paris: Cherbuliez, 1860) & *Histoire du Canon des Écritures saintes dans l'Église chrétienne* (Strasbourg: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1863); Albert Réville, *Études critiques sur l'Évangile de saint Matthieu* (Leyde: Noothoven van Goor, 1862); A. Stap, *Études historiques et critiques sur les Origines du Christianisme* (Second Edition; Paris: Lacroix, 1866); David Friedrich Strauss, *La Vie de Jésus*, translated from German original (1835) by Émile Littré (Second Edition; Paris: Ladrance, 1856) & *Nouvelle Vie de Jésus*, translated by Nefftzer and Dollfus (Paris: Hetzel et Lacroix, 1864). See *La Vie de Jésus* (1-301) in *Ernest Renan: Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1995), 24-5.

<sup>47</sup> See *Ernest Renan: Histoire des origines du Christianisme*, 55-6: "Les manifestations du Dieu caché au fond de la conscience humaine sont toutes du même ordre ; Jésus ne saurait donc appartenir uniquement à ceux qui se disent ses disciples. Il est l'honneur commun de ce qui porte un cœur d'homme. Sa gloire ne consiste pas à être relégué hors de l'histoire ; on lui rend un culte plus vrai en montrant que l'histoire entière est incompréhensible sans lui." ["The manifestations of the God hidden deep in the human conscious are all of the same type; Jesus could not thus belong only to those who call themselves his disciples. He is the common honour of all which possess a human heart. His glory does not consist of being relegated outside of history; we honour Him more truly by showing that History is incomprehensible without Him."]

denying Jesus's divinity, including the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and portraying Jesus as a charming prophet, a genius of moralistic philosophy, and the creator of true religion.<sup>49</sup> He declared the dogmas of modern Catholicism to be but naive and outdated superstitions, and those that accepted them, uneasy, blinkered spirits deprived of critical intelligence. Renan's Jesus was a man and His ideas the most revolutionary ever to have been conceived by the human mind. This negation of the supernatural worried members of the Catholic Church, for if Jesus was perceived as neither the Son of God nor as divinely inspired then the creator of modern Catholicism was nothing more than a jumped-up carpenter from Nazareth, and his ideas, the product of human pride and immodesty.<sup>50</sup> It was clear, therefore, that there could be little reconciliation between the Church and Renan's form of anticlerical positivism.

Hence, in the social context, positivism was diametrically opposed to religion with its emphasis on belief and the supernatural; modern philosophy was seen as emancipated from religious thought, or rather, the Church appeared to have been abandoned by the intellectual elite.<sup>51</sup> These issues underpinned the first decade of the Third Republic which was dominated by debate regarding the place of the Church within society. MacMahon's moral-order regime from 1873 onwards saw a marked divide between liberal republican free-thinkers whose ideal society was the secularised one of the Revolution and those conservatives whose vision of society was dominated by religious principles, the Scriptures containing the model to which society should conform.<sup>52</sup> Under this regime, conservative, clerical and monarchist forces had worked to gain political control, hoping for a restoration of the monarchy. Once the Republicans had stabilised the regime through electoral gains in 1877 and a majority in both the Assembly and the Senate forced MacMahon to resign in 1879, the state turned its attention, therefore, to dismantling the Church, which was seen to

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<sup>48</sup> Malcolm Warner, 'The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity and Islam', in Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984), 32-9, at 32.

<sup>49</sup> See Ernest Renan: *Histoire des origines du Christianisme*, 90-8, 156. Malcolm Warner (34-5) remarks that Strauss's *Leben Jesu* described the Gospels as mere myths embodying spiritual truths. In contrast, Renan's *Vie de Jésus* gave Christ back his historicity but stripped him of his divinity.

<sup>50</sup> Mgr. Maret, Évêque de Sura, *L'Antichristianisme* (Paris: Duniol Jouby, 1864), 35-44.

<sup>51</sup> Marina Warner, 237.

have played a prominent role in the assault on the Republic.<sup>53</sup> It did so by implementing a series of reforms laicising governmental, public, and, particularly, educational institutions.<sup>54</sup> This renewed attack on the Church and the legitimacy of its teachings as foundations for Republican society provoked a strong reaction among clerics, many of whom, although not all, entrenched themselves in the Church's dogma and hierarchical structure to launch a counter-attack on what they perceived as a de-Christianisation and hence de-moralisation of contemporary society.

Debate of these kinds of issues had intensified from the mid 1860s onwards as Napoléon III and his ministers took steps to reform and democratise the Second Empire. The modern ideas that had no doubt precipitated the fall of the imperial regime formed the basis of lay republican debate after 1871, at which time seminal texts such as Michelet's early *Le Prêtre, la femme et la famille* were attributed canonical status.<sup>55</sup> Léon Richer, a leading republican activist for social and educational reforms for women published a collection of articles entitled *Letters from a Free-thinker to a Country Priest* in 1868.<sup>56</sup> Here he neatly yet severely summarised why Christianity, in its Catholic form, was no longer compatible with free thought, explaining that religion denied all human capacities. In religion, science and reason were condemned by the rule of faith, for all true facts were supposed God-given and the research of those issues not directly revealed by God constituted a reproach of and rebellion against God's paternal majesty. This implied a negation of the capacity of the human brain because all that was considered good, wise, just and true could thus only have proceeded from God. For the Church, therefore, Richer identified reason as merely a pernicious device conceived by God as a trap for human intelligence with modern philosophy as the ultimate proof of the inanity of human reasoning.<sup>57</sup> Richer worked on women's issues in collaboration with Maria

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les débuts de la III<sup>e</sup> République 1871-1898*, Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine 10 (Paris: Seuil, Collection Points Histoire, 1973), 11, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Mona Ozouf (53) notes that the politically active and minded Mgr. Dupanloup had warned the Church (in vain) to keep a low profile in the campaign for monarchical restoration and the ensuing conflict.

<sup>54</sup> Ozouf claims (15) that the problems between the Church and the Third Republic were never more acute than with regard to education.

<sup>55</sup> McMillan, 27, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Léon Richer, *Lettres d'un libre penseur à un curé de campagne*, Première Série (Paris: A. Le Chevalier, 1868). These collected articles were originally published in *L'Opinion nationale*.

<sup>57</sup> Richer, 83-4.

Deraismes, and together they founded the weekly newspaper *Le Droit des femmes* in 1869. The following year they created an association of the same name which represented a close alliance of republicanism, anticlericalism and feminism.<sup>58</sup> Writing a decade later, Deraismes added to Richer's arguments, defining Catholicism as the extinction of the body through penitence and mortification, extinction of the human race through the glorification of virginity, and the extinction of liberty through the insistence on passive obedience.<sup>59</sup> However, as pointed out by Adolphe Guérout, Richer's editor at *L'Opinion nationale* and author of the preface to Richer's book, modern philosophy was a diverse subject, comprising many contradictory theories which were often isolated one from another. Positivist and evolutionary theories, among others, may well have been able to attack religion and unravel human society, but they were too diverse to be able to establish themselves as viable alternatives to a systematic and united Catholic church, with its vast hierarchical organisation, its disciplined, numerous and active 'personnel'.<sup>60</sup>

All manner of clergy and Catholic sympathisers seized upon the fact that modern philosophy had no real alternative dogma to offer. Monseigneur Maret, the Bishop of Sura, professor of theology at the Sorbonne, and one of the few clergy who dared to read philosophy, was among them. Despite his moderate and realistic approach, Maret sadly witnessed the growing secularisation and anti-Christian tendencies within society, and laicist society's direct attack on the sanctity of the Church, which had itself become identified as the enemy of legitimate freedom and progress of human society.<sup>61</sup> With the advent of the Third Republic and the State's laic reforms, Catholics could no longer accept a distinction between clericalism and religion.<sup>62</sup> To the extent that republican anticlericalism went hand in hand with positivism's negation of the supernatural, the conflation of anticlerical and antireligious policies was a valid perception. Indeed, conservative newspapers read the Republic's laicisation as an attempt to "expel God from daily life and to annihilate not a so-

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<sup>58</sup> For biographical details of Richer, Deraismes and their joint reform movement, see Patrick Kay Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up! The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 73-105. Also, McMillan, 130-6.

<sup>59</sup> Maria Deraismes, *Lettre au clergé français* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1879), 5-6.

<sup>60</sup> Richer, v-vi.

<sup>61</sup> Mgr. Maret, Évêque de Sura, *Discours sur la situation de l'église* (Paris: Impr. de J. Delalain, 1862), 3; id., 1864, 5-11.

called clericalism but, in truth, religion itself.”<sup>63</sup> Maret’s more populist colleague, the Mgr. Dupanloup, in a book directed at young men and husbands regarding perceived irreligious tendencies in the writings of certain contemporary philosophers, claimed that without religion and, therefore, without God, there could be nothing but immorality. This 1863 monograph clearly stated that when the Christian dogmas of God, Providence, the soul, moral liberty and immortality were ignored or overruled, there could be no fundamental distinction of good from evil, implying the reign of immorality.<sup>64</sup> In his disdainful pity of free-thinkers such as Hippolyte Taine, Émile Littré and Ernest Renan, Dupanloup outlined the two principal ideas which separated philosophy and religion: that reason and science were incompatible with faith and belief in the supernatural; and that the fundamental truths and morality on which society was based were considered divine and absolute by the Church but seen to be created and shaped by humanity in modern philosophy.<sup>65</sup>

Social lay reformers and anticlerical partisans of religious emancipation firmly denied Dupanloup’s and Laurichesse’s affirmation that irreligion equaled immorality.<sup>66</sup> Paul Janet saw philosophy as defending moral and religious order. Philosophy was not the means to liberate human society from its duties but a means to teach it to carry out its duties with reflection and conscious knowledge of its acts.<sup>67</sup> Maria Deraismes steered a middle course between Janet and Renan, Littré and Taine, defining morality as the natural, inalterable, fundamental and absolute principles which regulate the harmony of human behaviour within the society in which it operates. In her earlier publications Deraismes admitted religion, as well as philosophy, as a possible source of these essential qualities. In 1879, after the Church’s association in the conservative and monarchist attempt to topple the Republic, her *Lettre au clergé français* reflected an increasingly anticlerical position and the distinct belief that Catholic morality neither regulated nor tempered human

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<sup>62</sup> Ozouf, 55-6.

<sup>63</sup> Ozouf, 56: “expulser Dieu de la vie quotidienne et anéantir, non un prétendu cléricalism, mais bien la religion.”

<sup>64</sup> Mgr. Dupanloup, Évêque d’Orléans, *Avertissement à la jeunesse et aux pères de famille sur les attaques dirigées contre la religion par quelques écrivains de nos jours* (Paris: Duniol, 1863), 80.

<sup>65</sup> Dupanloup, 21-40.

<sup>66</sup> Abbé Antoine M. Laurichesse, *Etudes philosophiques et morales sur la confession* (Paris: Tolra et Haton, 1865), 273-7.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Janet, *La Famille, leçons de philosophie morale* (Paris: Ladrance, 1855), vii-viii.

behaviour but rather negated and hindered it. Like Richer, Deraismes criticised the Catholic dogma of 'original sin'—we are all born sinners due to the fall of Adam and Eve—as offending and denying the individual's liberty, equality and respect for others: three qualities that implied human solidarity and charity, charity supposedly being the stronghold of Christian morality.<sup>68</sup> Richer outlined how original sin and free will, admitted by the Church, were incompatible. To be born a sinner was to be incapable of escaping sin; sin was imposed on and enslaved the individual who sinned without the slightest intention of doing so. The individual was, therefore, not free to act and his free will was suppressed.<sup>69</sup> Gustave Flaubert, in a letter to George Sand, also expressed his disgust at the doctrine of grace and divine mercy which negated and devalued the idea of human justice and rights, thus constituting the opposite of social order. The fact that this was the morality 'decreed' by the Gospels implied, therefore, that evangelical morality was no more than immorality incarnate.<sup>70</sup> And yet French society was impregnated by Catholicism and Christianity, and Third-Republican state education merely taught a laicised form of the moral code preached by the Church since the beginning of the modern era.<sup>71</sup>

Similar ideas to Flaubert's are exposed during the Act II finale of the opera *Hérodiade*, when the Roman proconsul Vitellius proclaims the authority and justice of a lay society. This scene, in particular, highlights the tensions of the era, created by the split between religion and philosophy, since Vitellius's remarks are swiftly followed by Jean Baptiste's insistence on the divine provenance of justice. As a clear

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<sup>68</sup> Maria Deraismes, *Nos principes et nos mœurs* (Paris: M. Lévy frères, 1868), 125; ead., 1879, 74-6, 82-3. See Marina Warner (51-7) on the fourth-century formulation of the dogma of original sin and its consequences for women henceforward. Deraismes (1879, 37-40) also criticised the Church's extreme right-wing principles, noting its lack of participation, throughout history, in the lay or public interest. Reacting purely in its own interests to safeguard its power and riches, the Church for Deraismes had always reinforced privilege, for rather than heading the cause against repression of the lower social classes and slavery, it had merely 'compensated' them with the dogma of a better life in the next world.

<sup>69</sup> Richer, 44-6.

<sup>70</sup> See Alphonse Jacobs (ed.), *Gustave Flaubert-George Sand Correspondance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 332: "Je hais la Démocratie (telle du moins qu'on l'entend en France) parce qu'elle s'appuie sur « la morale de l'évangile » qui est l'immoralité même, quoi qu'on dise, c'est-à-dire l'exaltation de la Grâce au détriment de la Justice, la négation du Droit, en un mot : l'anti-sociabilité." [Translation drawn from Francis Steegmuller and Barbara Bray (eds.), *Flaubert - Sand. The Correspondence* (London: Harvill, 1993), 228: "I hate democracy (at least as it is understood in France), because it is based on 'the morality of the Gospels', which is immorality itself, whatever anyone may say: that is, the exaltation of Mercy at the expense of Justice, the negation of Right – the very opposite of social order."]

representative of Catholicism, Jean and his words stand in stark contrast to the proclamation of Ancient Roman civic authority, one revered by the Third Republic as a model for modern society and democratic government. The arguments are merely stated rather than fully debated in the opera, but contain the essence of the ideological divide in nineteenth-century society. Jean, therefore, resembles the modern clergy, although certain priests' publications against attacks on the Church's dogma were far more reactionary, not stopping at a reaffirmation of the divine inspiration of the Catholic priesthood, but blindly criticising all other valid religions. Abbé Lagoutte, whilst condemning other branches of Christianity – Protestantism, Greek and Russian Orthodoxy – went as far as to ridicule those who held true to their 'false' beliefs in death, calling them empty spirits of satanic pride, belonging to homicidal sects.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the clergy's violent reaction against liberal Protestantism was no doubt due to its involvement with Republicanism. Like Kantian philosophy, both consigned religion to the private realm and to the individual conscience, an inconceivable situation for Catholics.<sup>73</sup>

Liberal Protestantism refused dogma and reduced religion to a moral code, to theism and free-thought, thus presenting, for a considerable number of Republicans, a modern spiritual framework within which society could function. The Protestant sense of auto-moralisation, reflection and responsibility, even when removed from the context of religious devotion, appealed to Republicans and was seen to affirm the rights of the individual conscience.<sup>74</sup> Thus the influence of humanist ideals of liberal Protestantism, along with those of Freemasonry, was considerable in Republican reforms.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, many freemasons were protestants and even those protestants who were not freemasons were active in the upper echelons of Republican government.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Mayeur, 135.

<sup>72</sup> Abbé Hyacinthe-L. Lagoutte, *Du prêtre et de la société présente* (Paris: Lecoffre fils, 1868), x-xiv, 66.

<sup>73</sup> Mayeur, 111. In 1883, the positivist Renan wrote: "La religion est irrévocablement devenue une affaire du goût personnel." ["Religion has irrevocably become a matter of personal taste."] See Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), 44.

<sup>74</sup> Mayeur, 142-3.

<sup>75</sup> Ozouf, 56. This Catholic hostility towards Protestants and Freemasons (along with Jews) developed to unprecedented levels during the nationalist climate at the very end of the nineteenth century. The joint initiation of the Republican figures Jules Ferry and Emile Littré at the Loge Clémentine-Amicitie in 1875 was a well publicised event.

<sup>76</sup> Bidelman (61-2) affirms that, during the Third Republic, 21 prime ministers and 19 ministers of education were freemasons.

Although denying women full membership, French lodges, and particularly the Grand Orient, also provided liberal feminists such as Deraismes with public platforms from which to expand their influence and call for reforms in women's status.<sup>77</sup> With the passing of laws closing educational establishments run by religious orders, Protestants were also seen to sacrifice voluntarily their schools in the name of laicity, perceived as the forerunner to an independent civil society guaranteeing real religious freedom for minorities such as Protestants.<sup>78</sup> Such laicity was seen as all the more necessary in the face of an ever-increasingly totalitarian Catholic Church with Pius IX proclaiming not only the dogma of the Immaculate Conception but also that of papal infallibility in 1870.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the later promulgation was a deliberate reassertion of papal authority as the one true Christian spiritual guide as opposed to the reformed Protestant and Enlightenment admission of the individual conscience.<sup>80</sup> Hence, for the Abbé Lagoutte, Mgr. Ségur and the reactionary Chatelet, nineteenth-century Catholic dogma was Jesus's authorised version of God's divine truth, without error or imperfection, above all controversy, and proven by its eighteenth-century-long history.<sup>81</sup> As Catholicism was represented as the true spiritual inheritor of Christ's religion, so its clergy was considered as a divine mouthpiece of official dogma, and confession as one of its fundamental functions. Indeed, it was over these issues—the divinity of confession and the infallibility of the clergy—that most anticlerical hackles were raised.

### The Clergy and Confession

Ernest Renan's study of semitic languages had helped him formulate his theories on the authenticity of the Gospels and other books of the New Testament. For the clergy, the infallibility of the fathers of the early Christian Church went without saying,

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<sup>77</sup> Deraismes's 1868 monograph was a series of lectures given, with Richer's encouragement, at the Grand Orient Lodge in 1866. Deraismes later helped to found the first mixed lodge, becoming herself the first woman freemason in France, in the belief that women could find in freemasonry a humanist, alternative view of life and society than the one offered by the teachings of the Church. See Bidelman, xviii; McMillan, 223

<sup>78</sup> Ozouf, 86.

<sup>79</sup> Harris (14, 220), therefore, points to the ever-widening chasm that separated Catholics and Protestants.

<sup>80</sup> Marina Warner, 237.

<sup>81</sup> Lagoutte, 33, 59-60; Mgr. Louis Gaston Adrien de Ségur, *La Confession* (Paris: Tolra et Haton, 1862), 5-6; C. Chatelet, *De la confession et des principes religieux selon MM. E. Quinet et Michelet* (Lyon: Impr. de L. Boitel, 1845), 76-84.



whereas Renan urged a re-examination of the Gospels in the knowledge that their authors had frequently betrayed Jesus's beauty of sentiment by substituting their own ideas for ones that they had only half understood. By extension, the validity of Catholic priests as God's modern representatives, especially concerning the realm of the confessional, was called into question. Both Mgr. Ségur and Abbé Lagoutte insisted that the priest was invested with the divine authority to grant absolution.<sup>82</sup> As God's appointed intercessor between Himself and a penitent, the priest was placed on a higher plane, halfway between humanity and divinity, not a man and yet not God. Richer, however, openly questioned the priest's privileged position, affronting this point of dogma with Jesus's own teaching of equality of all people before God.<sup>83</sup> According to Laurichesse, it was due to their semi-immortal status that the clergy could remain strong in the face of the mortal weakness and impurity encountered in the confessional.

Criticism of a celibate clergy and its power to grant absolution again pulled Protestantism into the debate. Ségur and Lagoutte openly criticised the Protestant faith,<sup>84</sup> whilst Laurichesse affirmed that by abolishing confession, the Reformation had left man to his own devices, which accounted for the degree of individualism and many different denominations within the Protestant Church. For Laurichesse, therefore, this rejection of confession not only altered and profaned the religion Jesus established, but also showed a profound ignorance of and disdain for human nature; for without confession, society had no moralising force and, therefore, no morals.<sup>85</sup> As Catholicism could not conceive the idea of confessing directly to God (Ségur denied the utility of such an action, since God knew all a person's faults anyway), it confined its argument to the secrecy of the confessional. Ségur insisted that a priest left in the confessional the sins he heard confessed, and that his behaviour with his penitents in other situations and contexts was unaffected.<sup>86</sup> By replacing a Catholic priest with a Protestant one, other clergy saw only the 'pasteur' running home to tell

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<sup>82</sup> Ségur, 14-6; Lagoutte, xx. Lagoutte (19-23) went as far as to admit the occasional 'stray' who could not live up to the responsibility with which he had been invested but stressed the indulgent and charitable nature of the Church's punishment of these individuals who were reconciled through a blessing and then brought back into the fold.

<sup>83</sup> Richer, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Ségur, 14-6, 22-3; Lagoutte, x-xiv.

<sup>85</sup> Laurichesse, 324-50.

his wife that which had been confided to him. In Catholicism, the dogma of 'original sin' was too prevalent to admit the idea of auto-moralisation by the recognition of one's own sins, guided by, but not revealed to, a priest.

Michelet called for confessors to be better qualified in the things of everyday life, married or even widowed, with physical and moral experience of the domestic situation.<sup>87</sup> As to the need to confess at all, the Canadian Father Chiniquy was against asking a man to grant that which God alone could grant: the forgiveness of sins.<sup>88</sup> Chiniquy, himself a former Catholic priest, had personal experience to rely on. His monograph described confession as a machinal device of diabolic papal invention in which the confessor was forced to ignore his own intelligence and stifle his Christian conscience, for he was not placed there to save souls with divine or honest words but to damn, destroy and scandalise them.<sup>89</sup> In this case, not only was confession a degrading exercise for the penitent, but also for the confessor. Richer too expressed the sentiment that a priest had no choice but to leave his human conscience and intelligence outside the confessional, for the huge gulf between the worn-out formulas of the Catholic doctrine and modern thinking on the liberty and equality of the human mind and rights was unbridgeable. Chiniquy, in his zealous outpouring, went as far as to describe the confessional as the tomb of human conscience, honesty, dignity, liberty, and of the human soul. Laurichesse maintained that the priest merited his divine appointment to the confessional due to his virtue and chastity, values that, above and beyond his intelligence, had assured the continuity of Jesus's empire.<sup>90</sup> However, it was exactly this virtue and chastity that were doubted by anticlerical critics. Chiniquy stressed the human fallibility of priests, for as normal men, and not

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<sup>86</sup> Ségur, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Jules Michelet, *Le Prêtre, la femme et la famille* (Paris: Lévy frères, 1875), iii.

<sup>88</sup> Father Chiniquy, *The Priest, the woman and the confessional*, Third edition (Montreal: F. E. Grafton, 1874), 107.

<sup>89</sup> Chiniquy, 2, 17, 119, 140-2.

<sup>90</sup> Laurichesse, 252-6. Laurichesse (154-8) also reproached George Sand and her denigration of modern Catholic confession as a falsehood and obnoxious mystification of humanity's own moral sense, all the while Sand making full use of the principle of confession throughout her œuvre. For Laurichesse, all Sand's novels were just that, her own confession of her deception, pain, bitterness and revolt; all the heroines that she tore from the domestic situation and threw into the path of amorous encounters were nothing but the expression of her own contempt of social order and Catholic institutions: the bitter cry of her God-less and, therefore, inconsolable intelligence. Sand's *Histoire de ma Vie* was seen to go one step further, since she no longer tried to disguise her 'shameful' life behind fictional characters. Laurichesse misogynistically accused Sand of washing her dirty linen in public.

divine intercessors, priests were, for him, obviously open to corruption. Contrary to Laurichesse, he accused the Catholic church of depriving the clergy of St. Paul's remedy against human concupiscence—marriage—and then of placing the clergy, unprotected, in the path of irresistible moral danger.<sup>91</sup> Political life in Quebec reflected its French counterpart being marked by the division between liberals and clerical conservatives who alternately came to power. Chiniquy's diatribe against clericalism and the abuse of the confessional was translated into French in 1880, and was seized upon by French anticlerical campaigners.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Chiniquy's monograph was published in translation at a time of hardening anticlerical feeling in the wake of MacMahon's and the clergy's attempted 'monarchist coup' and subsequent urgent laic reform by republicans of France's institutions. It can thus be read as a Third-Republican source complementary to Jules Michelet's *Le Prêtre, la femme et la famille* which also outspokenly criticised the clergy's abuse of its privileged position as woman's primary interlocutor and intimate counsellor.

### The Feminisation of Catholicism

Despite the general tendency toward secularisation during the nineteenth century, Catholics remained a strong social body, and the Church enjoyed what has been described as a feminisation of Catholicism, brought about an influx of women into religious orders and the so-called devotional revolution promoting Baroque styles of worship such as the cult of the Virgin or the Sacred Heart which were perceived as attracting increasing numbers of women to the Church.<sup>93</sup> This movement was generally attributed to women's education and 'natural' affinity with the irrational and supernatural teachings of the Church. However, more recent social historians have detected its origins in the First Republic. The 'dechristianisation' of society, which grew out of the Enlightenment and gradual secularisation during the eighteenth century, was brought to a head by the Revolution which challenged the fundamental underpinnings of Catholicism and implemented repressive measures against the Church. At this time, the social and political status of women was

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<sup>91</sup> Chiniquy, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Theodore Zeldin, 'The Conflicts of Moralities: Confession, Sin and Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century', in Zeldin (ed.), *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education and Morals in the Nineteenth Century* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), 13-50, at 17.

<sup>93</sup> Harris, 212; McMillan, 54.

decidedly inferior to that of their men, who enjoyed new opportunities for political expression and a viable and public male identity as Revolutionary individual and republican citizen.<sup>94</sup> For women, the Republic brought with it a reinforcement of their subordination, and encouraged women to turn to religion to find self-identity, friendship and consolation for hardship and their disenfranchisement of earthly power.<sup>95</sup> Thus the Church provided women with an arena where, paradoxically, they could possess a public voice and take independent action, their sometimes violent activism helping to lay the foundation for the gradual feminisation of religious practice during the nineteenth century. In this way, women's personal and collective forms of piety became an expression of their autonomy and self-worth, albeit within the patriarchal structures of the Church and local community.

Other aspects which highlighted the feminised trend included women's attachment to popular styles of devotion and particularly to the growing cult of the Virgin. The changing intellectual climate and social background of the clergy during the nineteenth century allowed the clergy, in an effort to boost the diminishing numbers of Churchgoers, to promote popular religious practices which at other points in its history the Church had tried to eradicate. But such styles of worship were ideologically tamed and physically redirected by the clergy into a more serious and solemn vein of devotion, a process which engendered large-scale diffusion and *embourgeoisement* of what were originally cults of local and popular origin.<sup>96</sup> They included Marian devotion, Mary's humanity (allowing her a position as intercessor before an awesome God figure), the cult of the Sacred Heart (focusing on suffering

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<sup>94</sup> Desan, 207-14. A increasingly gender-defined division of labour and the development of lay education and leisure for boys and men also contributed to Catholicism's feminisation. In addition, Ralph Gibson (180-9) attributes confession and the clergy's authority and meddling in men's private lives over the issues of sex and contraception, often depriving men of absolution and, therefore, the sacrament, to the 'demasculinisation' of church attendance. He argues that women had fewer problems with confession, being used to male authority, hierarchical order, submission and the abandonment of their own judgement.

<sup>95</sup> Gibson, after Bonnie G. Smith, also describes women's ignorance of their bodily functions and reproductive cycle as a reason for their adherence to a traditional Christian world view, for a scientific appreciation of humanity was closed to them. Smith also sees a correlation between reproduction and redemption as part of Marianism: women endured physical sacrifice to redeem mankind as Christ (and Mary) had done. See Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 82, 95, 107-11.

<sup>96</sup> Gibson, 141-52.

and expiation of sin), and ultramontane piety.<sup>97</sup> These cults were seen to appeal particularly to women; their often sentimental and emotional (rather than intellectual) character was identified as gender-specific and equated with women.<sup>98</sup> Whatever the reasons attributed to women's allegiance to the Church, what French religious historians term the 'sexual dimorphism' of religious practice was a fact during the nineteenth century.

Michelet, among others, argued that the Church relied on the support of ill-educated, anti-modern women who opposed progress and who gave new emphasis to sentimental, meretricious and irrational aspects of devotion. Michelet also elaborated a rather imaginative picture of the relationships between priests and women in which clerics enjoyed almost conjugal intimacy with their penitents who were thus claimed as brides of the Church and alienated from their husbands and from Republican ideals.<sup>99</sup> By identifying the priest as a third and alien element in modern marriage, Michelet viewed the priest as an anti-Christian interloper, gaining intimate knowledge which women could not or would not share with their husbands.<sup>100</sup> As Michelet viewed a woman's husband to be her rightful tutor in all aspects of her physical, spiritual and moral instruction, this usurpation of the husband's position by the priest was condemned.<sup>101</sup> Chiniquy agreed that it was sacrilegious for a woman to seek a spiritual guide other than her husband, thus viewing Catholic confession as nothing more than adultery of the heart, mind and soul.<sup>102</sup> Michelet also spoke out

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<sup>97</sup> Gibson, 147-9, 182, 255-72. Gibson (148-9) identifies clerical exploitation of popular devotional practices for political ends. For example, post-1870 nationalism, the cult of expiation and monarchism were reunited in the promotion of the cult of the sacred heart—culminating in the building between 1876 and 1912 of the basilique du Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre, Paris, the National Assembly having voted for its construction in 1873 as an atonement for the spiritual and moral ruin that had led to France's 1870 defeat—and pilgrimage to Patay where the papal *zouaves* (defence army), under their banner portraying the sacred heart, had played an important part in an isolated French defeat of the Prussians. Thus pilgrimage to Patay became a clearly politicised activity, much more so than pilgrimage to Lourdes.

<sup>98</sup> Gibson, often citing Claude Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin: Les Congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), is to some extent also guilty of this equation.

<sup>99</sup> Harris, 213.

<sup>100</sup> Michelet, iii-iv.

<sup>101</sup> Whilst Michelet's arguments were firmly anticlerical, he did not hesitate to promote woman in marriage as a religion in her own right. Michelet's was a religion of the home with the wife as a living sanctuary and altar within marriage. Women could replace religion, and marriage could replace confession as far as Michelet was concerned, for the essence of marriage was conjugal confession, with all the hierarchical domination that that implied. See Michelet, *L'Amour* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1858), 270; id., *La Femme* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1860), 117-8, 252, 347.

<sup>102</sup> Chiniquy, 76-9.

against the supposedly divine character of priests in the confessional, arguing that by way of the information gained of a woman, the Godly priest was made man again for, however unconsciously, he had heavy-handedly weakened and disarmed his penitent. Her shame was therefore evident each time she saw the priest, and the humiliation of the family was complete when the priest effectively oversaw all household affairs, and knew its minutest details and weaknesses better than the man of the house.<sup>103</sup>

Michelet went on to compare the priest's authority over women to that of medieval husbands who were respected for their paternal severity. However, the priest was equipped with spiritual birches to render a wife docile and submissive in the hope of divine grace and mercy. As keeper of the keys to both heaven and hell, Michelet's priest was in a powerful position of seduction vis-à-vis his penitents with no-one to supervise his conduct. Michelet's image of a medieval priest equipped with the weapons of mental cruelty with which to subjugate women corresponds closely to the portrayal of a converted and penitent Thaïs, on whom the fourth-century monk Athanaël inflicts ascetic practices for expiation of sins committed. Indeed, the anticlerical debate of the nineteenth century is largely reflected in both the operas *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs*, and will be discussed in the following chapters. Whilst the representation of political anticlericalism is not absent from the operas, their scenarios concentrate more closely on the personal and intimate relationships between women and the clergy—Salomé and Jean, Thaïs and Athanaël—the mutual attraction of these women and holy men, the latter's omnipotent powers of seduction over women, followed by the abuse of women's trust brought about by the human failing of those religious men. In this way, the operas are seen to be in step with the anticlerical critique of Michelet or Chiniquy, the latter's book creating a polemic in Paris just as Massenet and his librettists were putting the final touches to the opera *Hérodiade*.

Indeed, Chiniquy concurs with Michelet. Chiniquy's main worry was the priest's abuse of confession concerning the sixth commandment. As chastity was necessary to enter the gates of heaven, confessors were urged to obtain as full a confession as possible concerning an individual's sexual habits. Whilst various confession manuals

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<sup>103</sup> Michelet, 1875, 206-8.

preached caution and delicacy in this matter, in order not to scandalise or weaken the resolve of modest penitents (even to the point of glossing over the most lurid details),<sup>104</sup> they still insisted on thorough and detailed questioning, Chiniquy's superior merely regretting any destruction of female virtue as an unavoidable evil of this process.<sup>105</sup> Mgr. Ségur openly admitted the clergy's willingness to question penitents on their 'sins of the flesh',<sup>106</sup> and Cardinal Gousset, whilst sidelining the issue for married adults, stressed the importance of questioning young people, who did not necessarily distinguish between their thoughts and their actions, as to their intimate conduct.<sup>107</sup> Chiniquy, therefore, stressed the humiliation and suffering brought about, not as the result of confession, but by the act itself. Contrary to the Church's idea that confession and absolution could grant peace to a penitent soul, Chiniquy portrayed the anxiety, terror, confusion and degradation of the woman who was forced to put aside her modesty, and commit the indiscretion against human decency of revealing her innermost secrets. This moral degradation of women was thus revealed as the Church's way of keeping a firm grip on modern society with the intent to ruin and overthrow the republican regime:<sup>108</sup> French wives and mothers could not instil the virtues of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* in their menfolk whilst they remained miserable and abject slaves of the Church.<sup>109</sup> Like Michelet, Chiniquy

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<sup>104</sup> Cardinal Gousset, Archévêque de Reims, *Théologie morale à l'usage des curés et des confesseurs*, 2 (Lyon: Périsse frères, 1844), 265, 343-4.

<sup>105</sup> Chiniquy, 14. Gibson (185, 264) points out that women were not held responsible for contraception practiced by coitus interruptus due to the increasingly frequent application of Ligourism, named after the Italian saint Alphonsus of Ligouri (1699-1787). A policy of 'if in doubt, be lenient', Ligourism meant that women were not only absolved despite practicing contraception but could also be spared interrogation over this issue in the confessional. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, priests also used Ligourism as an excuse to give up questioning men over the issue of contraception, the Church thus presenting a more reconciliatory stance to its decreased male membership.

<sup>106</sup> Ségur, 52.

<sup>107</sup> The way in which Mgr. Ségur made children feel guilty was particularly graphic and nasty, for he compared forbidden temptations to blood-sucking vampire bats, and portrayed those who committed mortal sin as recrucifying their saviour and redeemer, actually hammering the nails and covering themselves in the blood that poured from His wounds. See his *Aux enfants: Conseils pratiques sur les tentations de le péché* (Paris: Tolra et Haton, 1865), 17-8, 56-8.

<sup>108</sup> The Church admitted, via Laurichesse (24-5, 97), that confession was the God-given means through which Christianity seized hold of humanity and dominated it. As an effective repressive force, confession represented the only true solution to all problems of conscience, for it destroyed or limited all that was evil and washed away human impurity. Laurichesse's idea was, of course, based upon an infallible clergy, whereas the disabused Chiniquy (9-12) likened the actions of corrupt confessors to the pouring of hot oil on already raging fires rather than the washing of guilty souls with holy water.

<sup>109</sup> Chiniquy, 58, 81-2. Chiniquy actually diagnosed France's surrender at Sedan in 1870 as the direct result of French woman's unconditional surrender of her intelligence and self-respect to the Church and its clergy. Ireland's pitiful, impoverished, riotous and blood-thirsty history was also explained as the Church's fault. The enslavement and degradation of Irish women by the clergy could only

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scope and range of activities than republican wives, as long as they accepted their collaboration as subordinate to men and functioning within a patriarchal framework.<sup>113</sup>

### **Proudhon, Michelet, Legouvé**

Michelet's vision was no more about emancipating women than the Church's message of empowerment through faith. Whilst wanting to deliver women from the hands of clerical domination, Michelet was far from granting women any extra freedom, for the tutelage of his women passed directly from the priest to their husbands, Michelet reinforcing his earlier ideas with the publication of *L'Amour* in 1858 and *La Femme* in 1860. Michelet saw only dissension in the family where the priest had intimate knowledge of its workings. For him, the home should be a place of rest and refuge from the trials of the outside world. However, in the home where the wife, under pressure from her confessor to report on her achievements, waged war against her husband, the home became uninhabitable, resulting in a moral divorce between husband and wife.<sup>114</sup>

Whilst Richer was genuinely concerned by the 'moral divorce' within the family, the whole debate over confession and the Church's influence with women was more often characterised by a power struggle between different groups of men for authority and domination over the female population. Michelet and Chiniquy were quite happy to reduce the circle of influence over women to that of her husband. However, Adèle Esquiros was quick to point out that few husbands made worthy confessors, and Juliette Lamber to recognise that between man's despotism and that of God, even that of His representatives, there was little to choose, and at a pinch, she preferred the more disinterested authority of the clergy.<sup>115</sup> These women were provoked into

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<sup>113</sup> Harris, however, emphasises the moral stature and authority women derived from playing a secondary, service role. In rehabilitating French women Catholics of the late-nineteenth century in this way, Harris's apology begins to read like what Michelet would have defined as a Catholic conspiracy to keep women in their traditionally allotted place.

<sup>114</sup> Michelet, 1875, 267-8; Richer, 96. Chiniquy (76-9) thus identified the creation of a vicious circle, for the protestations of the husband ruined the woman's home life; her only real consolation was found with the priest who was, in effect, both the solution to and the root of all her problems.

<sup>115</sup> Adèle Esquiros, *L'Amour* (Paris: impr. Bry aîné, 1860), 24; Juliette Lamber, *Idées anti-Proudhoniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage* (Paris: A. Taride, 1858), 135-6. Esquiros had formerly been part of the Saint-Simonian movement, and her views retained the influence of the social doctrine for women espoused by the Saint Simonians. In the revolutionary climate of 1848, Esquiros

reaction, along with many others, by the publication in 1858 of *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* by Pierre Joseph Proudhon, coinciding with Michelet's ode to the subordination of women, *L'Amour*, published the same year.<sup>116</sup> Proudhon was a socialist campaigner for basic human rights and universal suffrage; his influence is still felt in modern socialism, and Proudhon cuts an important figure in the history of French socialism. He was also, however, the most conservative of men. He assumed that the general socialist and human emancipation movement would apply to only one half of human society, and when faced with women's rights, constructed a parallel set of arguments, applicable only to women, in order to reinforce the status quo of their subjugation.

Although his view is extreme, it is worth taking a closer look at Proudhon's writings on women, for they were influential on subsequent moral debate of not only socialist and workers' movements, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s, but also of a wider sector of society in the Third Republic. Proudhon's complete works were published from 1867 onwards, and *La Pornocratie*, a reply to his women critics, was published posthumously in 1875. Proudhon's and Michelet's monographs were seen as complementary and their influence was widespread and long-lived. Echoing Rousseauist ideas dear to Revolutionaries in 1789, Constitutionals in 1791, Napoléon in 1804 and republicans throughout the nineteenth century, Proudhon's reasoning was based on a prevalence of a social application of the natural differences of the sexes over the universal rights of individuals declared by the Revolution, which defined the ideology of a separate sphere for women. Proudhon set out to establish that women were physically, morally and intellectually inferior to men. Physically, man's strength lay in his virility, in his generative capacity and his

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helped to found the *Club de l'émancipation des femmes* which later became *La Société de la voix des femmes* with its official organ, *La Voix des femmes* (see McMillan, 85).

<sup>116</sup> The other member of what Bidelman terms as the "antifeminist troika" (41) was Auguste Comte. In both his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42) and his *Système de politique positive ou traité de sociologie* (1851-4), Comte upheld a vision of republican motherhood for women based on their moralising function within society. Thus as mothers, women were at the centre of a cultural project in which they had no authorship: outside the family women had no rightful place. Comte also presented woman's intellectual, social and political inferiority as the basis of her superiority in spirituality and love. See Landes (173-89) for an overview of Comte's views on women.

production of sperm.<sup>117</sup> Woman's reproductive organ was defined as a mere passive, incubative receptacle for male 'seeds'. Woman was, indeed, purely a convenient form chosen by nature for human reproductivity; she was an inferior being, halfway between the human and animal kingdoms.<sup>118</sup> Despite postulating women's intellectual inferiority as a result of their (lack of) education, his socialist background filtering through, Proudhon affirmed that a woman's intellect was proportionate to her strength. Capable of grasping issues and of deduction, woman was, however, incapable of synthesis, critique, judgement, philosophy, metaphysics and analysis, i.e. all that demanded abstract reasoning and creativity of mind. Women could not initiate ideas, since they were but a receptivity with no generative power of their own and no seeds to sow. Without male revelation therefore, Proudhon's woman could not shake off her animal state.<sup>119</sup> Morally, a woman's value was proportionate to her physical strength and intellectual capacity. Therefore, her conscience was feeble and she was essentially an immoral being.<sup>120</sup> Compared to man, woman's value in these three categories—physicality, morality, intellectuality—was defined in the ratio 3:2, which, when multiplied accordingly, as these three domains were considered proportionate and interdependent, resulted in the ratio 27:8. Woman's true value thus equalled less than a third of man's.

In Michelet's *L'Amour* of the same year, woman was portrayed as a physical fatality of nature due to her menstrual cycle.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, from the 1840s onwards, femininity was increasingly defined via the menstrual cycle. In the same way that science enforced a subordination of the supernatural and, therefore, of the Church, to positivist thought, so post-Darwinian medical science brought clinical proof to bear

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<sup>117</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*, 3 (Paris: Garnier frères, 1858). Proudhon (349-59) erroneously affirmed the reabsorption of sperm by the brain, pointing out that both the athlete and the scientist would abstain from sex to conserve and fortify their talents.

<sup>118</sup> Proudhon, 337-40.

<sup>119</sup> Proudhon's notions of male revelation as necessary for women to become socially acceptable echo Saint Paul's misogynist ideas on women and their relationship with God, which necessarily passed via their husbands who alone were 'created in God's image'. See Marina Warner, 178-9. Bidelman (6-8) also remarks upon the similarity between Saint Paul's and Napoléon's views on the subordination of women. See also Hufton, 111.

<sup>120</sup> Proudhon, 364.

<sup>121</sup> Michelet, 1858, 1-16.

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Europe's most influential writers on the woman question.<sup>127</sup> During the 1860s, his book, or excerpts of it, was translated into Spanish, English, Swedish, Russian and Italian, and it was still considered progressive in American feminist thought of the mid-1880s.<sup>128</sup> Born of the 1848 revolution, Legouv e's monograph demanded women's emancipation on the basis of their distinctive physiological, mental and emotional differences from men, and of their social role as mothers: 'equality in difference'.<sup>129</sup> In an effort to reform women's legal rights, education and economic situation, Legouv e condemned the legal subjugation of women in the 1804 Napoleonic code and advocated the doctrine of separate but parallel spheres for men and women in marriage. Thus, amidst claims by women for equal rights as individuals with access to employment and citizenship under the new Republic,<sup>130</sup> denied them by the first, Legouv e demanded new rights for women without fundamentally disturbing the notion of women's natural difference and the role it prescribed them in society.<sup>131</sup> Like Prouhon and Michelet, Legouv e insisted on the family as the basic socio-political unit, and this cult was displayed through lengthy discussion of women in relation to men, as daughters, wives and mothers.<sup>132</sup> However, unlike Proudhon, Legouv e rejected all attempts to infer an arbitrary hierarchy of superiority/inferiority between men and women.<sup>133</sup> He insisted that women's intelligence was of equal value to men's but different in character: men's intelligence was characterised by reason and women's by intuition. Unlike Michelet, Legouv e did not put women on a pedestal either, and using similar recent medical studies by way of which Michelet condemned women to constant invalidity, Legouv e insisted on the creative importance of a mother, declaring that women could no longer be considered as a mere receptacle for male seeds, faintly echoing Jeanne Deroin's claims.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, Legouv e turned women's biosocial function into an argument for the major legal and educational reforms he advocated. His concrete

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<sup>127</sup> Offen, 1986, 456.

<sup>128</sup> By 1896, the French version of the book had reached its tenth edition.

<sup>129</sup> Offen (1986, 454) stresses how, within a decade, Legouv e's slogan 'equality in difference' had become the leitmotif of the organised republican movement for women's rights in France.

<sup>130</sup> See Scott, 87-126, for analysis of the career of the Second Republican campaigner, Jeanne Deroin.

<sup>131</sup> Offen (474-5) stresses that Legouv e's notion of wifely devotion was more progressive but no less consuming than Rousseau's prescription for women's subordination in marriage, although Legouv e's work bore no echo of his predecessor's arguments.

<sup>132</sup> Offen, 1986, 464, 468.

<sup>133</sup> Offen, 1986, 474.

<sup>134</sup> Offen, 1986, 455, 471. On Deroin, see Scott, particularly 103-8.

programme of reform for marriage and women's social role within the bourgeois order, founded on sexual distinctions and division of labour within the home and society, as well as his concentration on the family, was progressive in a France where women's legal position within, and outside of, marriage was so unfavorable. As such, his project was taken up by certain feminists as a moderate way forward for their cause.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, its influence was such that Legouvé's argument of equality in difference in the domain of women's education founded the basis of the Third Republic's policy for secondary education for girls, established by the law Camille Sée in December 1880,<sup>136</sup> and was imparted directly to girls through Third-Republican education manuals.<sup>137</sup> In this way, Legouvé's moral and intellectual 'differences' were appropriated by the Third-Republican establishment as a valid argument to keep women out of the public domain.

The two main responses by women to Proudhon and Michelet at the end of the 1850s fell into two categories which formed the basis of the two main strands of feminist activism through the nineteenth century. Juliette Lamber was encouraged to publish her reply to Proudhon by her radical colleagues and friends at the *Revue philosophique*.<sup>138</sup> Lamber was later to become the 'revanchiste' Third-Republican activist and salon hostess Juliette Adam; in 1858 she championed the feminist cause by arguing for a division of labour in complementary domains (equality in difference) for men and women, and later in her (long) life, she used her considerable influence in a realm traditionally associated with women, the society salon. Jenny d'Héricourt, on the other hand, whilst expressing her admiration for Legouvé's realistic demands for women,<sup>139</sup> argued a more radical line, refusing to recognise the validity of difference between the sexes and concentrating on liberal individualism and the idea

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<sup>135</sup> Offen, 1986, 455-6.

<sup>136</sup> See Karen Offen, 'The Second Sex and the Baccalauréat in Republican France, 1880-1924', *French Historical Studies*, 13 (1983), 252-86.

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Clarisse Juranville, *Le savoir-faire et le savoir-vivre. Guide pratique de la vie usuelle à l'usage des jeunes filles*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition (Paris: Larousse, 1889). This monograph, first published in 1879, was widely read and often re-edited (reaching its 29<sup>th</sup> edition in 1924) for it figured on the list of works supplied without charge by the Parisian council to its communal schools. For the chapter entitled "Le rôle de la femme au foyer domestique" (66-7), the author merely cites Legouvé.

<sup>138</sup> Juliette Lamber, *Idées anti-Proudhoniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage* (Paris: A. Taride, 1858). See Bidelman, 43-4. McMillan (125) affirms that Lamber expected Jenny d'Héricourt to lead the defense against Proudhon's *De la Justice* and only entered the fray herself when d'Héricourt 'refused' to do so.

<sup>139</sup> Offen, 1986, 478.

of a single, egalitarian social body.<sup>140</sup> Jenny d'Héricourt had long been a staunch and erudite defender of women's rights in the face of attack from Proudhon, including a notable exchange of open letters between the two published in *La Revue philosophique* from December 1856 to February 1857.<sup>141</sup> By applying reason and logic to Proudhon's theories in *De la Justice*, d'Héricourt destroyed his arguments by displaying their incoherence and erroneous assumptions, thus portraying Proudhon in a far from flattering light.<sup>142</sup> D'Héricourt's riposte of 1860 was also, however, directed at Michelet. She outlined how she almost preferred Proudhon's abrupt and contradictory science to Michelet's lack of ideological reasoning and methodology, where arguments were constructed of imaginary truths and illustrated by generalised exceptions to the rule.<sup>143</sup>

Legouvé's line of campaign for women's issues, championed by Juliette Lamber, was later taken up in the Third Republic, with variations, by Maria Deraismes and Léon Richer who founded the claims of their *Le Droit des femmes* on Legouvé-esque premises: revision of the Civil code, legal reforms for women, better, laicised education for girls, higher and equal wages for women workers as an antidote to prostitution, implementation of a single standard of morality, the opening of the liberal professions to qualified women and women's control over their own wealth

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<sup>140</sup> Jenny P. d'Héricourt, *La Femme affranchie: Réponse à M.M. Michelet, Proudhon, E. de Girardin, A. Comte et aux autres novateurs modernes*, 2 volumes (Bruxelles: A. Lacroix, Frères Van Meenen et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1860). See Bidelman, 44-6. Bidelman (46-8) also reviews the relative successes of Lamber's and d'Héricourt's publications, Lamber's more moderate and less intellectual tone appealing to a wider audience thus having the greater influence. See also Katharine Ellis, 'The Fair Sax: Women, Brass-Playing and the Instrument Trade in 1860s Paris', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 124 (1999), 221-54, at 243, where she affirms that due to its radical stance, d'Héricourt's book provoked censorship in Paris, which was reflected by its publication in Brussels.

<sup>141</sup> See d'Héricourt, 1, 142-52, for the essence of this often personally embittered exchange.

<sup>142</sup> In Proudhon's posthumously published *La Pornocratie* (1875), the first page (2) is personally addressed to both Lamber and d'Héricourt and contains the following attack: "A doctrine is judged when it provokes such a phenomenon: I only had to sit back and leave you to your victory. What more could I wish for than to see a would-be antagonist degrade herself with all the trivialities that hurt vanity and anger can amass in a woman's brain." ["Une doctrine est jugée quand elle produit de pareils phénomènes : je n'avais qu'à me frotter les mains, et vous laisser dans votre triomphe. Que pouvais-je souhaiter de mieux que de voir une prétendue antagoniste se ravalier par tout ce que la vanité blessée et la colère peuvent amasser de futilités dans un cerveau de femme?"]

<sup>143</sup> D'Héricourt, 1, 95-9. Similarly, in the 1880s, Louis Fiaux dismissed Proudhon's theories but remained wary of Michelet's isolation and subjugation of woman as a pretext for creating a superior being. By putting woman on a pedestal, as the Church had done to the Virgin, Michelet effectively prevented her from marching forward with the other half of humanity. Dr. Louis Fiaux, *La Femme, le mariage et le divorce. Etude de physiologie et de sociologie* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1880), 97-8.

and property.<sup>144</sup> These reforms were demanded, often in the name of the harmonious patriarchal family and the rehabilitation of Republican motherhood, to improve women's status whilst the place ascribed to women in society was accepted, i.e. the concept of women's 'natural' difference was manipulated to claim new rights for women. However, neither Richer nor Legouvé claimed for women the right of identification with the Revolutionary icon Marianne—the free individual with full rights within society, the (male) subject of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*—for they never demanded political emancipation for women.<sup>145</sup>

The second broad strand of nineteenth-century feminism took the opposite tack, fighting for the right to accede to the category of universal individual, declared by the Revolution, thus progressing to citizenship and the vote, the only way, in the opinion of Third-Republican activist Hubertine Auclert, for women to participate in the political and legal decisions that affected their everyday lives.<sup>146</sup> Unlike the doctrine of 'equality in difference' therefore, her arguments sought to minimise the differences between the two sexes, or at least prove their non-pertinence in order to access a social status hitherto reserved for men. As d'Héricourt had done before her, Auclert identified and exposed the inherent contradictions in Republican theory and practice which led to the unjust and unjustifiable subjugation of women in the name of reason, science and positivism—all the qualities Republicans worshipped.<sup>147</sup> Through the 1880s in *La Citoyenne*, she encouraged women to show themselves as good, intelligent republicans by supporting anticlerical issues, such as the bill for the expulsion of the Jesuit order, in order to overcome the preconceived ideas of alliance between irrational women and supernatural faith, still one of the main arguments for refusing women the vote.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, Auclert's activism focused on the obtaining of political rights for women, for she believed the sexual division in social and political

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<sup>144</sup> Bidelman, 94-9; McMillan, 223.

<sup>145</sup> Scott (115) affirms that Legouvé disapproved of female suffrage as transgressing the spatial borders forming the sexual difference on which all his reform ideas were based. Emancipation for women for Legouvé could only occur within the family: political emancipation for women was classed as an absurdity.

<sup>146</sup> For further details on Hubertine Auclert, see Bidelman, 106-54; McMillan, 137, 188-91; Scott, 127-70.

<sup>147</sup> Scott, 169.

<sup>148</sup> McMillan, 189-90; Scott, 147.



domains to have been arbitrarily imposed to protect the male monopoly of certain professions and political power.<sup>149</sup>

Thus from the 1860s onwards, debate over the women question was incessant. The main areas addressed were marriage and the family, motherhood and depopulation, education and employment, emancipation and suffrage, adultery, separation and divorce. All these subjects are dealt with, to different degrees, in the opera *Hérodiade*, and will be discussed in the following chapter. The issue of marriage and a woman's role within it as a demure and submissive associate to her husband and nurturer of children will be explored via the relationship between Hérode and Hérodiade. Women's search for something more than this traditional role of wife and mother will also be examined through the character of Hérodiade, whose political activities lead her to usurp her husband's authority, effectively emasculating his virility. Hérodiade's political emancipation is mirrored by her physical and moral one: she is an adulteress, a 'divorcee', she has rejected motherhood. Thus her direct attacks on the revered patriarchal family lead to immorality, sexual licence and depopulation.

### **Marriage and the Family**

Regeneration of the patriarchal family was generally considered a vital step towards a renewal of society. The ideal family, guaranteed by God and/or society as man's yardstick and woman's protection, should be based on love and duty.<sup>150</sup> In this context, woman found her natural and rightful position as man's associate and as a mother to care for and educate her children. Once flooded with family spirit, society would regain its respect, love, faith, hope, purity and, most of all, national pride. However, even within republican thinking during the second half of the nineteenth century, woman's ideological position within this scenario was hotly debated. For many male moralists, it was only through woman's monogamous association with an upright man that she found her reason for being and raised herself from the intellectual and moral abyss into which she was born (as a woman). Michelet, for

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<sup>149</sup> Scott, 164.

<sup>150</sup> Janet, 291-6.

example, followed nearly thirty years later by J. P. Dartigues,<sup>151</sup> insisted that women sought strength from masters to help them out of their misery, and encouraged responsible husbands to nurture their wives, spiritually and materially nourishing them (as woman nourished man by her love, blood and milk), to become their associates.<sup>152</sup> This role of tutor/tutée for husband and wife necessarily brought with it a subjugation of women, and any change to this superior/inferior relationship was seen as a travesty of the institution of marriage.<sup>153</sup>

It was for that reason that George Sand defined the marriage formula as society's dictate that a wife must promise to be faithful and submissive. For Sand, the former was a pure absurdity and the latter meant total humiliation.<sup>154</sup> Sand's ideas were no doubt based on her own unconventional experience, and her provocative views on the bourgeois 'trading' of dowries and 'placement' of daughters in financially judicious unions without concern for a couple's compatibility, mutual esteem or love were portrayed in her novels through strong, and thus immoral, heroines who resisted a life of loveless marriage enforced upon them by society's laws and conventions.<sup>155</sup> Proudhon condemned as immoral Sand's representation of girls sacrificed to

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<sup>151</sup> Dr. J. P. Dartigues, *De l'amour expérimentale ou des causes d'adultère chez la femme au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Versailles: A. Litzellmann, 1887), 2-5, 10-1. Dartigues (51) reminded men of their superiority, cautioning them not to further humiliate their wives by revealing their dependence to them: men could easily back down over an issue without damaging their pride for they were aware of their superiority. In their submission over such an issue, women, however, were believed to feel enslaved.

<sup>152</sup> Michelet, 1858, xviii, 110, 120, 274. In a dubious analogy for sex and procreation, Michelet (1858, 139) even explained when this spiritual/physical marital instruction could occur for it had to be regulated according to woman's natural debility, her menstrual cycle, as not to bombard woman at a time when her constitution would not allow her to receive.

<sup>153</sup> Janet (57) absolved men from any feelings of guilt they may (or may not) have had over the subjugation of their wives by reassuring men that it was, in fact, women who rendered their domestic position a humiliating and powerless state, by conceiving it as servitude and a constraint of their freedom.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in Léon Richer, *Le Livre des femmes* (Paris: Librairie de la Bibliothèque démocratique, 1872), 145.

<sup>155</sup> Even the feminist Deraismes (1868, 99) anonymously criticised Sand's novels for denigrating marriage and homelife by representing it purely as a source of dissension and argument, without prestige or even necessity. For Deraismes, the image of marriage and the family had been strangled by the shackles that supposedly bound two incompatible people together. In 1872, however, Deraismes seemed to express a preference for Sand's type of novel rather than the one that represented the wayward heroine as a passive victim of her unconscious weakness. Accompanied by the fictional model husband in such novels, for such husbands were in-existent in the real world, woman's fault was seen as all the more criminal as her betrayal was not a case of revenge or having at last found true love, but mere pernicious lust. See Maria Deraismes, *Eve contre Monsieur Dumas fils* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1872), 54-5.

marriage; he deemed it a “loathesome trading” of reluctant young women.<sup>156</sup> But Proudhon was no more enamoured of the Church’s version of marriage either. For him, and others, Christianity, far from exalting marriage, had condemned it and had only ever tolerated it as the practical and monogamous solution closest to clerical chastity. Reinforced by the cult of the Virgin, love and sexuality had become inferior and sinful, destroying all communion of conscience in marriage and creating a separation of hearts and minds.<sup>157</sup> Christian marriage was, therefore, reduced to legal concubinage with no moral ideal of its own, a social state that did not conform to Proudhon’s ideal of ‘justice’. The title of Proudhon’s 1858 publication specified his notion of a perfect phallocratic, socialist society: *Justice*. Anything that did not conform to this idea was necessarily corrupt. Marriage was an institution that, if conducted along Proudhon’s lines, guaranteed the production and progress of this *justice*, and it was only through marriage that women could participate in the support of *justice* and social glory.<sup>158</sup>

Marriage, for Proudhon, was a social necessity and function of humanity, as procreation is a function of the organism. Outside of marriage, not only love and procreation but also the distinction between the sexes had no sense, and was unnatural. Marriage was instituted purely for women’s benefit; in marriage, men forewent their strength and let themselves be exploited, sacrificing their liberty, fortune, pleasure and work, and risked their honour and wellbeing in order to fulfil a necessary social function. The sacrifices endured permitted men to subjugate their wives, confining and limiting their freedom, and even inflicting atrocious punishment on their infidelities as compensation and revenge for women’s ingratitude.<sup>159</sup> In marriage, Proudhon admitted that whilst, in theory, partners were equal and their union based on mutual devotion, in practice, women could not be equal partners due to their physical, intellectual and moral inferiority, already described. Women had to accept their husbands as their superiors, for marriage could not exist without this subordination. Any levelling influence or equality destroyed the essence of marriage;

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<sup>156</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 414-28.

<sup>157</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 289-99. See also Richer & Chiniquy. Proudhon also expressed views similar regarding the clergy to Chiniquy and Michelet, i.e. the priest distances husband and wife from one another and commits mystic adultery and incest as her spiritual confessor.

<sup>158</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 193, 474-8.

marriage would thus be degraded and become unnatural, obnoxious and ugly. As far as sex was concerned, Proudhon preached chastity, rather like the Church which he nevertheless saw as having condemned sexuality as sinful, creating discord within marriage. And yet for Proudhon also, ideal love was incompatible with sexuality. The sexual act was ridiculous to him; disgusting to the passive witness (i.e. woman); sad and annoying for the initiator (i.e. man); an experience in which men lost their sense of liberty and rendered their souls shameful. Men took wives as confidantes, confessors, guardians of material wealth and needs, and as oracles of the male conscience; thus to share sex (more often than was necessary for procreation) was to sacrifice women's honour and love. Despite his lofty ideals for both partners, Proudhon still put the onus on woman's chastity; it was her only value, and her glory was the chaste fidelity of her husband. If she renounced her own chastity she opened the way for her husband to renounce his fidelity.<sup>160</sup>

By the 1880s, progressive doctors and moralists such as Louis Fiaux were able to dismiss Proudhon's theories, and in 1892, Marie Dugard happily affirmed that debate over whether woman constituted part of the human race was medieval and long since dead.<sup>161</sup> In spite of such opinions, Proudhon's ideas were echoed during the Third Republic. Whilst the wholehearted adoption of the concept of 'equality in difference' had somewhat neutralised Proudhon-like insistence on women's subordination, it also provided a legitimate premise for a whole barrage of literature confirming woman's equality, but reaffirming and underlining her profound difference: a separate sphere, morality, destiny and mode of reasoning were defined for women. Both Alexandre Dumas *fils* and Henry Marion, Sorbonne professor and moral philosopher, outlined the theory that, despite their differences of obligations and aptitudes, man and woman contracted marriage on an equal footing. There was thus no superiority or inferiority between man and woman, there was but difference. Man was the stronger of the two, the natural leader representing the family outside the home, protecting, defending and providing for it. As the husband had the greater responsibility for the family, he should naturally be granted the greater authority,

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<sup>159</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 232, 214-5.

<sup>160</sup> Proudhon, 1875, 55; id., 1858, 245-6.

<sup>161</sup> Dugard, 120.

recognised by the submission of the wife. Good, intelligent women who loyally accepted their husband's superiority, a legal pact between nature and society, were respected, worthy and happy.<sup>162</sup> Those women, however, who chose to brave this superiority (which did not exist at the outset of this reasoning), went against their own constitution and destiny, were travesties of nature, and were as ridiculous as men who should wish to have babies.<sup>163</sup> Thus the recurrent theme of the Third Republic was that a woman who merely sought to use her own initiative or who researched something different from the traditional role allotted to her sex, went against nature, rendering herself ugly and ridiculous.<sup>164</sup>

In the opinion of the clergy, the concept of marriage was not so far removed from Proudhon's and Michelet's ideas. For Mgr. Dupanloup, as for many, marriage was the one true emancipation for women. Despite the submission and obedience they owed to their husbands, marriage elevated women from their miserable and inferior position to their rightful place as a glorious handmaiden, as man's noble companion under the conjugal roof. Marriage for woman was perceived as the home and heart of her respectful love of and affection for man, her chastity and domestic modesty; marriage sanctified woman's duty and man's authority with its necessary subordination.<sup>165</sup> Through God's decision to send humanity his Son via a virgin, the Son of God became the Son of Man, and Mary, the mother of God on earth; woman had been given an example of the dignity and worthiness of her sex, of her duty to her husband and, moreover, her children, an example of humility, tenderness, religious piety, self-sacrificing love and devotion. Due to its divine origin, patriarchal authority was considered the most holy of all human authorities, and thereby the family unit took on sacred proportions. With regard to their children, mothers were prescribed a docile, conciliatory role, conforming to their inferiority. Woman supposedly imparted feminine values to her progeny whilst her husband, in an

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<sup>162</sup> In her *Dictionnaire du Savoir-vivre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1898), the Vicomtesse de Nacla (alias Mme Théodore Alcan) suggests that paternal authority has been destroyed but that those families that 'savent vivre' have maintained it in all its exterior manifestations (161-2).

<sup>163</sup> Marion cited in Dugard, 169; Alexandre Dumas fils, *L'Homme-Femme: Réponse à M. Henri d'Idéville* (Paris: M. Lévy frères, 1872), 92-4.

<sup>164</sup> Women's social role, as designated by the Civil code, only began to be modified and subject to reform during the 1880s.

authoritative role, inculcated masculine ones.<sup>166</sup> Despite having no civil authority over her children, Dupanloup recognised a Christian mother's natural and divine authority as a reflection of that of the Virgin, but relegated it to a subordinate role, reducing it to a mere reflection of and participation in her husband's prerogative.<sup>167</sup> The consolidation of the domestic, political and religious traditions of the patriarchal family, including the subordination of women, would also permit the nation to become strong once again.<sup>168</sup>

Feminists tried to steer a clear course between the Proudhon-esque and the Church's view of marriage for women. Indeed, Juliette Lamber had seen the immediate danger in Proudhon's theories, saying that

they express the general feeling among men who, whichever party they belong to, [...] would be delighted that a way be found to reconcile their egoism and their conscience in a system that allows them to preserve the benefits of exploitation based on strength, without fear of protests based on rights.<sup>169</sup>

For Lamber, Proudhon's real crime was the legitimisation of tyranny due to strength, his explanation of woman's subordination as a result of nature, and his transformation of this 'principle' into law and *justice*.<sup>170</sup> And yet moderate feminists were able to adopt the idea of a reformed hierarchical patriarchal family through the promotion of 'equality in difference' and republican motherhood as they had done in 1791. But whilst they could accept different roles for men and women within society, the Third-Republican feminists could not conceive of the extension of the notion of difference to moral and intellectual domains, thereby highlighting an inherent and

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<sup>165</sup> Mgr. Dupanloup, Évêque d'Orléans, *Le mariage chrétien* (Paris: C. Duniol, 1869), 29, 43, 49-51; id., *Lettres sur l'éducation des filles et sur les études qui conviennent aux femmes dans le monde*, Second edition (Paris: J. Gervais, 1879), 114.

<sup>166</sup> Dupanloup, 1869, 57-64; Janet, 104-11. Whilst Janet and Dupanloup used similar religious terminology for the sanctity of patriarchal authority, Dupanloup reinforced it with a royalist one. A father was to his family as a king was to his kingdom, both his wife, a minor under civil law, and his children were his subjects and belonged to his domain; the word 'queen', however, is never even mentioned.

<sup>167</sup> Dupanloup, 1869, 87, 315-6.

<sup>168</sup> Clarisse Bader, *La femme française dans les temps modernes*, Second edition, (Paris: E. Perrin, 1885), 559-69. (First published 1883.)

<sup>169</sup> Lamber, 55-6: "elles [ses doctrines sur la femme] expriment le sentiment général des hommes qui, à quelque parti qu'ils appartiennent, [...] seraient enchantés qu'on trouvât le moyen de concilier à la fois leur égoïsme et leur conscience en un système qui leur permît de conserver les bénéfices de l'exploitation appuyée sur la force, sans avoir à craindre les protestations basées sur le droit." Dr. Louis Fiaux (80-1), some years later, approved her anxiety, remarking that Lamber was, in fact, a case in point which annihilated all Proudhon's theories on women.

<sup>170</sup> Comte also, freely borrowing from the Napoleonic code, reinforced the social division of the sexes as the result of universal law. See Landes, 180.

problematic paradox of arguments based on 'equality in difference'. Deraismes affirmed that as soon as two different moralities were admitted, morality, as an eternal and fundamental law, ceased to exist. The resulting immorality, or even amorality, was thus due to the inequality of the sexes and women's subordination to men: humanity was debased, used only half its strength, and opposed two human camps creating but discord and waste.<sup>171</sup> Contrary to Janet and Dartigues, Michelet and Proudhon, who believed the patriarchal family, and, therefore, the subjugation of women, to be the most important factor in the recreation of patriotic feeling, Deraismes could visualise the Republic's fortunes only as they might be interlinked with woman's emancipation. But for Proudhon, Dumas *filis* and Marion, any attempt by woman to usurp man's emancipated position was not only unnatural, but also debased and humiliated man and his virility, to whom woman had sworn obedience in marriage.<sup>172</sup> For Proudhon, marriage without women's subordination was no longer marriage but rather concubinage: a material and sexual exchange which tended neither towards monogamy or indissolubility, but towards a liberal freedom without any notion of infidelity or jealousy.<sup>173</sup>

### Adultery and Prostitution, Separation and Divorce

Adultery was viewed as the result not of sexual emancipation for woman but merely as the consequence of pleasure derived from frequent participation in the sexual act with her husband which would encourage a woman to seek voluptuous pleasures elsewhere, implying her adultery and, ultimately, prostitution.<sup>174</sup> The idea of adultery as the first step on the road to prostitution was also a common one. Dumas *filis* noted that if, at the very outset of marriage, a man found his virgin bride open to and creative in sex, he should be worried for his future honour, for she was a natural

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<sup>171</sup> Deraismes, 1872, 60-71.

<sup>172</sup> Article 213 of the Napoleonic Civil code legally obliged married women to obey their husbands. See McMillan, 38.

<sup>173</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 454; id., 1875, 57-60.

<sup>174</sup> Dartigues (145-77) identified the same 'problem', blaming Malthusian ideas on population restraint as the reason behind the growing popularity of onanism as a form of contraception, which in turn led to more pleasure being obtained from sex. Maria Deraismes (1872, 48-9) reversed the male view, reasoning that woman's adultery was more often the result of her husband's infidelities. If one partner shirked their conjugal obligations, the aim of marriage remained unfulfilled and the tacit authorisation for the adultery of the other partner was given. If a woman was adulterous, therefore, Deraismes looked to the morals and infidelities of her husband, for a wife could not be expected to maintain a virtue that was absent in her husband.

candidate for adultery. Despite such beliefs, a number of manuals were published encouraging love and enjoyable sex in marriage which were often written along the same lines as Michelet's opuses, where men were assigned a professorial role to turn the girls they married into wives and mothers.<sup>175</sup> Continuing his argument, however, Dumas  *fils*  insisted that if a wife took a second lover it was no longer an involuntary act but a wanton one, and she was no better than a prostitute.<sup>176</sup> Proudhon shared a similar idea that prostitution was the result of love and sex, even within marriage. For Proudhon, despite a man's capacity for animal lust, woman was more generally obsessed by a romantic vision of love. As she naturally possessed no modesty (like all her qualities, she received it only from contact with man and particularly through marriage), she was, therefore, more likely to crave continual 'love' in the form of prostitution.<sup>177</sup> George Sand concentrated on the contradiction that prostitution was freely committed out of love and desire. She saw only a gratuitous male act without reciprocity on the part of women of the slightest sentiment and, therefore, a sacrilege against nature, love and sex, the privilege of two people, equal in respect and love for one another.<sup>178</sup> Fiaux later categorically rejected Proudhon's ideas, explaining that prostitution had nothing to do with love, sex or modesty, being purely the result of woman's financial misery and her search for well-paid 'work'.<sup>179</sup>

Legouvé noted that the prostitute population was sustained by girls of over fifteen years of age who had been seduced. For Legouvé, the numbers of disgraced children, often pregnant ones, presented a national threat that delivered half the nation, as prey,

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<sup>175</sup> See Gustave Droz, *Monsieur, Madame, Bébé* (Paris: Hetzel, 1866), 113-4. McMillan (106) affirms that Droz's monograph went through 121 editions by 1884.

<sup>176</sup> Dumas  *fils* , 1872, 40-1, 86-7.

<sup>177</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 370. For Proudhon, this theory was borne out by the much higher numbers of women prostitutes than men. In this erroneous argument, Proudhon even admitted that he had not taken the economical and political context into account. That an analysis of the causes of prostitution can be undertaken without this context shows Proudhon's obsession with women's inherent (lack of) capacities.

<sup>178</sup> In a letter to Gustave Flaubert of 8 February 1867. See Jacobs (ed.), 127; or in translation, Steegmuller & Bray (eds.), 63.

<sup>179</sup> Fiaux, 94. Parent-Duchâtelet's classic text, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris considéré sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration*, which appeared in 1836, described prostitutes as a class of women, born morally defective with recognisable physiological characteristics. However, his work also affirmed that proletarian women were often driven to prostitution through economic necessity, rather than any innate tendency towards prostitution. See McMillan, 107.



into the hands of evil men.<sup>180</sup> Legouvé was concerned with reform of the Napoleonic code. It prohibited paternity suits, leaving seduced young women without recourse to resources to support any eventual children. Napoléon was sensitive to a bourgeoisie worried about the dissipation of family fortunes and blackmail from mothers of children fathered by their sons' (often prenuptial) sexual experiences.<sup>181</sup> It was this legal endorsement of the bourgeois double moral standard which Legouvé hoped to reform. And yet the notion of illegitimate children and the dilapidation of the *patrimoine* was a powerful notion which also sustained the legal and penal inequality for men and women judged guilty of adultery. Thus, in the case of adultery a woman could be imprisoned for up to two years whereas a man could only be fined up to a maximum of 2000 francs. To bring a case for male adultery was also much more difficult, for it was necessary to prove that a man had defiled the marriage bed in the conjugal home before his adultery could be legally admitted.<sup>182</sup> However, a wife caught in *flagrant délit* could actually be legally murdered by her husband. Dumas *filis*, along with Michelet,<sup>183</sup> affirmed man's right to homicide, for if a woman introduced illegitimate children and false heirs into her marriage, man was considered to have been morally assassinated and totally humiliated. Dumas *filis*, in his 1872 'letter' to Henri d'Idéville (who had condemned this law), reasoned that, so long as divorce did not exist, there was no justice for the cuckolded man, and he therefore had the right to take justice into his own hands and murder his wife. Thus, as perpetrators of crimes of passion, many men were acquitted for want of what Dumas *filis* saw as the possibility to judge and condemn the 'real' crime and criminal.<sup>184</sup>

Although divorce did not exist when Dumas *filis* was writing, legal separation did. It was an unsatisfactory solution, however, because it excluded the possibility of

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<sup>180</sup> Legouvé, 73-80.

<sup>181</sup> McMillan, 159. In contrast, during the First Republic, women had the right to pursue paternity suits. (Landes, 139.)

<sup>182</sup> Bidelman, 5. Bidelman (216, n. 6) notes the unclear nature of the extent to which the Code's legal strictures actually impinged on women's everyday lives but rightly views the principles it embodied as having powerfully reinforced the notion of patriarchy.

<sup>183</sup> Michelet, 1858, 270.

<sup>184</sup> Dumas *filis*, 1872, 99-102, 175-6; id., *Les femmes qui tuent et les femmes qui votent*, Tenth edition (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1880), 40. Bidelman (79-80) views Deraismes's counter-attack on Dumas *filis*'s 1872 book, her *Eve contre Dumas filis*, as typical of her strident, aggressive and optimistic style of feminism.

second marriages. In real terms this did not prevent couples setting up home together but their union remained not only outside of acceptable social norms but also outside of the law, and any resulting children were thus legally illegitimate. Fiaux remarked that separation was often presented as more moral than divorce but that this opinion failed to take into account human physical needs and desires to recreate a family unit which could, indeed, be legalised by marriage if divorce replaced separation, and brought with it the right to remarry.<sup>185</sup> Fiaux realised that the separated woman possessed even fewer rights and less freedom than the married one, and so extolled divorce as protecting women's rights, not diminishing them (as feared by the anti-divorce lobby who could only visualise abuse of divorce laws, particularly by men who wanted to rid themselves of their wives).

And yet the resistance to the reinstatement of divorce was also intimately linked to fears over women's growing social and intellectual emancipation, the perceived contradiction between divorce and the Republican cult of motherhood and the patriarchal family, and mounting concern over population numbers. Fiaux noted the French insistence on the link between the healthy family unit and the indissolubility of marriage and defined it as curious when other, non-Catholic countries which granted divorce lived neither in a disorganised nor an immoral social state.<sup>186</sup> Fiaux believed that, safe in the knowledge that divorce was possible, couples would treat each other with greater respect and tolerance, and like other advocates of divorce, argued for its strict control, as well as highlighting the unsatisfactory and immoral nature of legal separation. The divorce law, which was finally passed in 1884, was based on Léon Richer's 1873 text *Divorce*,<sup>187</sup> and was taken up by the radical Alfred Naquet. The militant socialist Naquet published his controversial *Religion, propriété, famille* in 1869, in which he actually urged for the abolition of marriage in the campaign to destroy bourgeois society.<sup>188</sup> From the start of the Third Republic, he attempted to restore the far-reaching Revolutionary divorce legislation of 1792. Indeed, Dartigues ridiculed the fears of those who predicted a rush to the divorce

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<sup>185</sup> Fiaux, 153-6.

<sup>186</sup> Fiaux, 145-50. One may suppose that Fiaux was referring to Britain and Germany, and that his argument includes a public health issue: if allowed to remarry, couples could produce more legitimate children, creating a strong, moral population.

<sup>187</sup> Bidelman, 58, 91-4.

courts by citing the example of the Revolutionary divorce law, affirming there to have been fewer divorce demands than demands for separation in the ten years prior to the Revolution.<sup>189</sup> However, Naquet's bill foundered in the National Assembly in 1876 and 1878, and he was forced to fall back on a divorce bill which rather echoed that of the Empire, gaining the backing of the Assembly in 1882. It was ratified by the Senate in 1884 only after considerable revision.<sup>190</sup>

### Education and Employment

Woman's traditional education was bound up with her religious instruction and had the sole aim of mitigating her natural tendency for frivolity and ignorance by creating a good wife and mother, capable of sympathising with her husband's occupations and instructing her children. Even Ernest Legouvé, with his plan of reforms for women's education, saw it as merely a means to an end and not an end in itself. Women had the right to fulfil their intelligence but, like Michelet, Proudhon and Janet, Legouvé confused human conditioning and nurture with human nature. He affirmed that women naturally lacked creativity and, in a comparison very reminiscent of Janet, explained that their intelligence was equivalent to that of men, only dominated by secondary qualities, whilst in men's intelligence, superior faculties prevailed. For Legouvé, woman's lack of education merely compounded this natural deficit.<sup>191</sup> A common denominator in all debate concerning women's education was pedantry. In the wake of Molière's *Les femmes savantes*, most critics refused to admit that women could attain anything more than a superficial level of knowledge. In agreement with Michelet that a husband must complete his wife's education with purer, more honourable thoughts that stemmed from his virile reasoning, Janet urged against specialised or thorough knowledge in any one subject for this could only result in pedantry, a quality even less palatable in women than in men. Women's moral and intellectual education should be conducted in the home under the watchful eye of a mother, for, unlike young men who were permitted a certain moral licence, young

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<sup>188</sup> McMillan, 152. Naquet served a prison sentence for the unconventional views he published.

<sup>189</sup> Dartigues, 203-6. McMillan (34), nevertheless, puts the number of divorces granted between 1792 and 1803 at 30,000.

<sup>190</sup> McMillan (152) notes that it remained very difficult to get a divorce until the process was simplified by law in 1886. Auclert criticised the divorce law for whilst she recognised its partial elimination of the double standard for adulterers, she believed it to have sidestepped completely the issue of women's servitude in marriage. See Bidelman, 107.

women were expected to reach maturity without having committed any faults or indiscretions. Education in the home was thus seen to assure the ideal woman, for a woman must be modest, discreet and innocent yet gracious and seductive; she must be pleasing and yet must not please herself too much. Janet, therefore, seems to have been more interested in striking a delicate balance between a narrow-minded reserve that dulled the vigour of the mind, and the proud pretension that provoked the vain science of pedantry, than the inculcation of any real, progressive values for women.<sup>192</sup>

Women's education had traditionally been conducted at home or under clerical supervision. Michelet had remarked that, due to a woman's education being entirely in the hands of the clergy, woman was brought up to hate and disdain that which the free Frenchman believed in: Revolution, Republicanism and the future.<sup>193</sup> Proudhon remarked upon a similar phenomenon, defining woman's constitution as aristocratic, women preferring the right-wing values of distinction, privilege and preference to *justice*, that socialist leveller of society.<sup>194</sup> For Third-Republican reformers then, it was of paramount importance to rid women's education of its religious emphasis. Women's traditional and religious upbringing caused Richer to describe woman's mind as full of prejudices and superstitions, unexamined thoughts and unquestioned faith. This suffocation of woman's mind, which denied her human rights and stifled her aspirations and initiative by imposing blind obedience to a superior will, was diagnosed as the cause of society's greatest ill. For the moral divorce between men and women that was souring France's marriages was the direct result of woman's insufficient education.<sup>195</sup> Deraismes expressed the need for religion to be refined and philosophy to be democratised within the home through the education of women in

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<sup>191</sup> Legouvé, 50-67, 372-81.

<sup>192</sup> Janet, 44-70, 182-200.

<sup>193</sup> Michelet, 1875, 266; id., 1860, 15-6.

<sup>194</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 365-6.

<sup>195</sup> Richer, 1868, 93-4, 103, 220. See also Ozouf, 94-5. Ozouf notes the denunciation in *Le National* of 13 July 1875 of "l'espèce de divorce intellectuel et moral qu'on voit dans presque toutes les familles", and the plea of Richer's and Deraismes's *Le Droit des femmes*, on 1 February 1880: " Il est temps que cesse ce divorce ; il est temps que les sources du savoir s'ouvrent toutes grandes pour la femme ; qu'à cette rayonnante clarté se dissipent de son esprit : ignorance, erreurs, superstitions [...] C'est alors que [...] le jeune esprit de l'enfant recevra d'un même cœur la double semence de la science et de la vertu ! C'est alors aussi, et alors seulement que la république pourra se dire indestructible..."

order to create a viable modern family unit and, therefore, society.<sup>196</sup> Laic reform of women's education, as well as a more equal education for men and women could thus rejuvenate marriage and family life, a first step to the renewal of society.

And yet, with influential educators such as Mgr. Dupanloup, the Church had somewhat modernised its ideas on suitable intellectual occupations for women.<sup>197</sup>

Whilst Dupanloup argued that the role of woman's education was purely to ally her more closely to the ideas of her husband, and not so that she could annoy him with her pedantry and brash willingness to discuss anything and everything, he condemned the shutting off of 'legitimate' horizons for women.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, he too was concerned with the health of society and patriotic sentiment, believing that gentle, intelligent and diligent women could not fail to create happy homes.<sup>199</sup> In his order of the Christian woman's duties, the cultivation of her mind was in sixth place after her duties to God, her husband, her children, the home and the poor.<sup>200</sup> For them to become good mothers and educators, women's God-given capacity for study must be exploited; women must be given a sound culture in order to fulfil their potential and avoid the revolt that led towards the moral abyss, brought on by frustration. Failure to do so was not only a grave mistake but also an attack on God's wisdom itself.<sup>201</sup> Dupanloup wanted instructed, judicious, organised, diligent and sensible women, equipped with the necessary tools to carry out their traditional duties, not intellectual ones. He believed that such study (not neglecting its calming effect on the mind) heightened woman's intellect, allowing her more complete possession of herself. Conscientious Christian study was seen to give women a sense of self which only made them better, submissive wives.<sup>202</sup> Woman's first and foremost occupation was, therefore, that of a housewife. Dupanloup thus limited woman's intellectual

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<sup>196</sup> Deraismes, 1868, 102-9, 142-3.

<sup>197</sup> Dupanloup's *La Femme studieuse* of 1869 went through seven editions before 1900. See Offen, 1983, 258. Offen (1986, 477) affirms that Dupanloup's monograph was inspired by Legouvé's *L'Histoire morale des femmes*.

<sup>198</sup> Neither individual development nor intellectual curiosity were deemed valid reasons for women's education by Dupanloup. See Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Bourgeoise: Femme au temps de Paul Bourget* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1983), 260.

<sup>199</sup> Dupanloup, 1879, 25, 115-9.

<sup>200</sup> Mgr. Dupanloup, Évêque d'Orléans, *De la haute éducation. Quelques conseils aux femmes chrétiennes qui vivent dans le monde sur le travail intellectuel qui leur convient* (Paris: V. Goupy, 1866), 4-9.

<sup>201</sup> Dupanloup, 1879, 108-9, 124-6, 164-5.

<sup>202</sup> Dupanloup, 1866, 6-13, 44-5, 53.

occupations to amateur status rather than the exercise of any real profession. For a clergyman, he was, however, liberal in the intellectual occupations he recommended for women. Religious study was an obvious candidate, Dupanloup insisting that it was not because women were more observant than men that they might neglect their religious instruction. Surprisingly, philosophy was not prohibited (although, in his view, publications such as the *Revue des deux mondes* were best avoided as they exposed their readers to the anti-religious ideas of authors such as Renan and Taine). Aesthetics, in its truly philosophical sense, was also allowed. Presumably, Dupanloup sought to distinguish between the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of concepts such as beauty and taste, and the study of the rules and principles of art, since, of the latter occupation, he warned women to beware of the research of sensualism, for sensual art was considered but a pagan one on the slippery slope to hell. The sciences were simply dismissed, since women were generally esteemed incapable in this domain, although the practice of the 'lowest' of the sciences, agriculture, was seen as woman's duty, reinforcing her link with fertile Mother Nature. Creative writing and critique were permissible so long as they did not upset the family's routine, as was letter writing, excluding all vanity, chatter and verbosity, although diary writing was to be avoided since, as a source of escapism, a woman's own diary tended to become her own novel.<sup>203</sup>

Dupanloup's liberal outline for women's education closely corresponded to that of Legouvé and to the one elaborated according to the Camille Sée law of December 1880 creating public secondary education for girls. The main difference of the Third Republic reform, however, was that it took girls out of the home and into girls' *lycées* in order to educate them. It was over this issue that the project provoked fierce debate which highlighted the paradox between Third-Republic theory and practice—its plan to force a public role and thus public responsibility on young women students to whom it had previously only assigned a private role due to the primacy of the doctrine of sexual difference and separate spheres of activity.<sup>204</sup> As Janet's monograph shows, girls' education in the home was associated with the preservation

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<sup>203</sup> Dupanloup, 1866, 26-50.

<sup>204</sup> Martin-Fugier, 17.

of their virginity.<sup>205</sup> In order to combat accusations of assault on female integrity, therefore, Third Republicans reaffirmed their wish to educate girls to be discreet, modest and duty-conscious, and to be excellent wives and mothers. This was education which would not tear girls away from their 'natural vocation' but rather equip them to better fulfil their traditional occupations and obligations.<sup>206</sup>

Woman's education was thus destined to be a general, practical and useful one that prepared her for her moral and domestic role as wife and mother, but woman's true function as housekeeper, comforter, domestic ornament and educator did not exclude the development of a wider culture. For Marin Ferraz, however, women's instruction necessarily excluded the study of speculative and abstract sciences such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, Greek, Sanskrit or metaphysics. Ferraz flippantly added that, like Proudhon, he preferred to see woman in the kitchen or in front of a mirror than writing about differentiation or Spinoza's *Éthique*.<sup>207</sup> Even if a woman attempted these studies, it was obvious that her knowledge could not rise above pedantry—the habit to display the often insignificant details of undigested learning—for, once again agreeing with Proudhon and with Janet, Ferraz saw woman as incapable of prolonged reasoning, proceeding more by intuition and guesswork.<sup>208</sup> Thus the curriculum outlined by law in 1882 comprised domestic economy, hygiene and gymnastics, but also included modern languages, the study of humanist classics (in translation, for the languages taught did not include Latin or Greek), the history of civilisation, and art.<sup>209</sup> This programme of secondary education was to last five years and end with the 'diplôme de fin d'études' which did not allow access to the universities.<sup>210</sup> However, the *lycées* did offer the chance to take primary school

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<sup>205</sup> Bonnie G. Smith (186), with regard to convent education for girls, implies the same, arguing that the closed site of the convent with its cult of innocence and virtue, symbolised girls' protection from the "forbidden knowledge" of their sexuality.

<sup>206</sup> Martin-Fugier, 55, where she refers to the first chapter of the seminal modern text on women's education: Françoise Mayeur, *L'Enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977); Offen, 1983, 257.

<sup>207</sup> Ferraz, 52-7.

<sup>208</sup> Ferraz (54) cites Renan, too, as believing woman to possess a particularly tactful understanding, different to man's scientific one, but one which could more easily grasp the ideas of refined philosophy.

<sup>209</sup> Offen, 1983, 259.

<sup>210</sup> Offen, 1983, 262. Hubertine Auclert in her 'Une loi stérile', *La Citoyenne*, 24 April 1881, condemned the Sée law for providing no training which could lead women to socio-economic

teaching certificates, a profession considered respectable for young women as an extension of their 'natural' maternal capacities.<sup>211</sup> Such emancipation of young women from the home and from marriage, often enforced by financial considerations and the lack of dowries for women from the *petite bourgeoisie*, was anathema to conservative critics such as Clarisse Bader.<sup>212</sup> Bader believed a woman's education should occur in her God-assigned place, the home, and be conducted along Dupanloup's lines.<sup>213</sup> Like him, she believed it an offence against God to ignore the education of women to fulfil their God-given duties; woman's natural weakness must be compensated for in this way. Such reasoning, enlightened by faith (a contradiction in republican terms), would provide a woman with the moral energy and strength needed to guide her intelligence and passions. A public education was a masculine one with no concern for girls' morals, natural faculties or even religious aspirations.<sup>214</sup>

When women were given the right to gainful employment, it was thus to tasks for which they showed 'natural' aptitude. Juliette Lamber, in her 1858 response to Proudhon, stressed the importance of professional and/or vocational training for women, for only through work could women, as men before them, be emancipated. Lamber continued to champion the equivalence of specific male and female aptitudes, viewing employment as seamstresses, milliners, florists and shopkeepers as particularly suitable for women, along with other traditionally male professions which were being transformed by advances in industrial technology.<sup>215</sup> Bader later agreed that although motherhood and housework officially debarred them from public life, if women had to work, such professions, as well as teaching from home,

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independence from marriage and from men, it institutionalising women's subordination. See Bidelman, 107; Offen, 1983, 256.

<sup>211</sup> Offen, 1983, 262.

<sup>212</sup> Clarisse Bader was a prolific writer, biographer of women and historical figures in many different historical contexts and periods (see bibliography), and contributed articles to historical and/or Catholic periodicals including *La Revue du monde catholique*, *L'Université catholique*, *L'Association catholique* and *La Revue des questions historiques*. A certain number of her books are now available in digital format (and on-line) from the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>213</sup> Martin-Fugier, 256.

<sup>214</sup> Bader, 489-515. Bader was also profoundly worried that girls who were taught Catholicism in school as merely one religion among many would be unable to accept the concept of plurality and lose their faith altogether.

<sup>215</sup> Lamber, 90-2.



were suitable.<sup>216</sup> Legouvé admitted the arts and humanities as well as teaching and moralistic writing for women, suggesting that well-educated women be given the responsibility of inspectors in feminine domains, i.e. nurseries, schools, charitable organisations, orphanages, hospitals and even women's prisons.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, all caring professions and philanthropic activities were sanctioned for women who were thus seen to play a maternal role in wider society, an extension of their natural and private vocation.<sup>218</sup>

For working class women, the debate over employment was conducted with an (even more) moral tone, whilst reformers addressed women's right to work and the right to equal pay for equal work. Legouvé had disliked the idea of women in competition with men for jobs, insisting woman's true career to be that of her husband, thus relegating women to the home and ignoring the issue of unmarried women who had no family with the means to support them.<sup>219</sup> Indeed, this was the opinion of many male writers, and some women such as Clarisse Bader to whom, as to Michelet, the word 'ouvrière' was downright impious and sordid to the ear. Their texts expressed a need to protect women from the public sphere of work and extolled the virtues of running a household. Proudhon, Michelet, Auguste Comte, Emile de Girardin, followed by Jules Simon and later Alexandre Dumas *fils* saw women's employment as the profanation of a feminine ideal, incompatible with women's 'natural' role of wife and mother, and believed women's true emancipation to depend on her liberation from labour outside of the home.<sup>220</sup> In accordance with Michelet's cherished medical notions of what affected woman's social being, he insisted that women could not fulfil the sedentary, repetitive tasks demanded by factory work due

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<sup>216</sup> Bader, 461-78.

<sup>217</sup> Legouvé, 412-33.

<sup>218</sup> Martin-Fugier, 16. The debate over women doctors was fierce, men and conservative critics restricting women's activities as physicians to other women and children (Legouvé), as (inferior) partners to doctor-husbands (Michelet), or as a quasi-religious vocation for unmarried women who were prepared to dedicate their whole lives to suffering humanity, in order to avoid the betrayal of family law (Bader).

<sup>219</sup> Legouvé, 349-0, 388-92.

<sup>220</sup> See Bidelman (11-3) who also names the conservatives who extolled domesticity for women: Alfred de Mun, Frédéric Le Play and the pope Leon XIII, through his socially-orientated 1891 encyclic, *Rerum Novarum*. Jules Simon's views in *L'Ouvrière* of 1861 were reiterated thirty years later in his *La femme au vingtième siècle* (1892) which marked an entrenching of his position in the face of emancipatory change for women, and reflected the view that women who invaded the male sphere

to uncomfortable physical symptoms they produced in women.<sup>221</sup> Women were thus better suited to jobs involving regular changes of activity, such as housework. However, Michelet failed to examine economic factors which forced many women to work and the poor wages which drove some women to casual prostitution;<sup>222</sup> Michelet prescribed marriage as the sole remedy for all society's ills. At that time, only a handful of writers such as Julie Daubié, prominently the first woman to obtain the baccalauréat in 1861, argued for social justice for the poor working woman through better education and training, providing equal job opportunities for men and women, along with equal rates of pay for equal work.<sup>223</sup>

During the 1840s, the utopian socialist movement made feminism an integral part of its doctrine by linking male domination of women to class oppression.<sup>224</sup> Inspired by such ideology, Hubertine Auclert later spoke at the *Congrès national ouvrier* in Marseille in 1879, uniting women and workers under the banner of exploited minorities. She believed it illogical and immoral that male workers should be associated with their bourgeois oppressors (i.e. their employers) in the domination of women.<sup>225</sup> Auclert thus persuaded delegates to adopt a resolution in favour of sexual equality in the work place.<sup>226</sup> However, Proudhon's influence loomed particularly large in syndicalist and socialist movements, and resolutions made in 1879 were short-lived.<sup>227</sup> By the 1890s, as feminists stepped up their claims for political equality, increasingly parliamentary socialists envisioned no part in public life for

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became masculinised. (See McMillan, 63.) Thus women who worked in gainful employment were no longer considered to be women.

<sup>221</sup> Michelet, 1860, 22-34. It seems ironic that the jobs Michelet found unsuitable for women were precisely those in which women were employed in large numbers.

<sup>222</sup> McMillan, 74. McMillan refers in particular to single women for whom it was almost impossible to earn a living wage.

<sup>223</sup> Julie Daubié, *La femme pauvre au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1866). Written in 1858. See Ellis, 243-4; McMillan, 117-8.

<sup>224</sup> McMillan, 84. See particularly Flora Tristan's *Union ouvrière* (1843) in which she called for working class men to admit women to full and equal union membership as the first step towards the future evolution of society's morals. Tristan had first-hand experience of women's legal inferiority—through her legal separation which prohibited her from remarrying, and a custody battle for her children—and believed that divorce and monogamous marriage could bring into existence a natural and moral state of equality. On Tristan, see Landes, 189-98.

<sup>225</sup> Scott, 138, 155-6.

<sup>226</sup> McMillan, 137.

<sup>227</sup> Marilyn J. Boxer, 'Socialism Faces Feminism: The Failure of Synthesis in France, 1879-1914', in Marilyn J. Boxer & Jean H. Quataert (eds.), *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Elsevier, 1978), 75-111, at 77.

women.<sup>228</sup> As public alarm over the growing participation of women in the work force mounted, socialists won votes by supporting the 1892 legislation protecting women from the worst working conditions, but which also restricted them from taking some of the best paid jobs: the daily number of hours women were allowed to work was limited but women were excluded from premium-paid night work.<sup>229</sup> Thus the socialist and feminist movements split apart towards the end of the century, the rift widened by women workers' movements who, whilst recognising the legitimacy of bourgeois feminist claims for equal rights, saw them as ineffectual to relieve the double oppression of working women who needed to ally themselves to working men against bourgeois women.<sup>230</sup>

### Political Rights and Civic Duties

The wide area of caring professions, charitable works, education, physical and moral hygiene, traditionally associated with bourgeois women, provoked Ernest Legouvé in 1848 to suggest the creation of a national duty for women. In revolutionary, 'equality in difference' spirit, he proffered the idea of an equivalent of national service for women in which they would be expected to work with the poor, sick and needy. Indeed, in 1885, Hubertine Auclert supported a proposition of obligatory military service for men, counter-balanced by humanitarian service for women: "Territorial defence will be entrusted to men – Aid for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled will be entrusted to women."<sup>231</sup> These different tasks were seen to constitute equally vital functions which should thus justify political equality for men and women. The link between the vote and national service was a prevalent one during the 1880s. Alexandre Dumas *fils* felt that women could be granted political rights if they undertook military service.<sup>232</sup> The generally misogynist Dumas *fils* seems to have posited this idea in ironic spirit, as evidence that it was inconceivable that women would be asked to undertake military service. It was an argument that was happily adopted and adapted by anti-emancipation campaigners who turned Dumas *fils*'s satire into a serious argument for women's political exclusion. Thus, the

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<sup>228</sup> Boxer, 86.

<sup>229</sup> Offen, 1984, 657; McMillan, 178.

<sup>230</sup> Boxer, 92.

<sup>231</sup> Scott, 165.

<sup>232</sup> Dumas *fils*, 1880, 123-4.

conservative Bader, in a polemic stance, believed it a necessity for women to serve their country in the armed forces if they were even to benefit from civil rights.<sup>233</sup> More moderately, Dartigues also agreed that military service should be the pendant to women's right to vote, but astutely pointed out that a great number of men were exempt from national service due to infirmity, profession but retained their right to vote.<sup>234</sup>

Auclert founded the *Société nationale pour le suffrage des femmes* in 1883, but already in 1880 she began her militant action by trying to register to vote in Paris.<sup>235</sup> She publicised the refusal of the town hall to accept her as a voter and the more general exclusion of women from citizenship and politics by withholding payment of her taxes.<sup>236</sup> Not possessing the right to elect a parliamentary representative to defend her interests, nor the right to vote the taxes, Auclert refused payment which she viewed as demanded of women arbitrarily and in a wholly undemocratic manner. Auclert's sense of rational logic appealed to Alexandre Dumas *fils* who, despite his misogynistic views, seemed inspired by her action to ask why, without the right to professional work or a decent wage, women should have to pay taxes anyway; indeed, without going so far as to argue that women should be tax-exempt, Dumas *fils* appeared to demand better education and employment opportunities for women.<sup>237</sup> Despite Dumas *fils*'s admiration for Auclert's stand, the Third-Republic administration was not ready for such an open act of defiance: her possessions were seized, she was tried and even imprisoned for her crime.<sup>238</sup> However, by the turn of the 1890s, the situation was very different. Despite few real gains for women's rights, women were seen to occupy an increasingly large section of public society, encroaching further and further upon the traditionally male sphere and creating intense feelings of hostility among male social commentators.

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<sup>233</sup> Bader, 457-60.

<sup>234</sup> Dartigues, 44.

<sup>235</sup> Bidelman, 109-15.

<sup>236</sup> McMillan, 188.

<sup>237</sup> Bidelman (125-6) terms Dumas *fils*'s reaction to Auclert's tax strike in *Les femmes qui tuent et les femmes qui votent* as "surprising".

<sup>238</sup> Dumas *fils*, 1880, 180-207. The outraged Dumas also pointed out the inequality in a society that generally treated woman as a frail inferior but was quite happy to judge and confine her as a strong equal.

## Emancipation, Female Suffrage and Depopulation

The word 'émancipation' in relation to women was invariably used in France during the nineteenth century to designate political emancipation and the right to vote. Auclert's type of militancy denounced the egotistical and antisocial character of the assimilation of masculinity and the political class. She wished to conquer and share political power, believing that women would govern in a more altruistic fashion than men, who generally protected their privilege. Auclert viewed the ideology of separate spheres as arbitrarily imposed by men to protect patriarchal power. She denounced evolutionary arguments affirming women's inferiority and lack of mental aptitude for impartial reasoning (and thus women's exclusion from politics), as a fable concealing expulsion accomplished by legal methods. She therefore advocated the denial of socially-defined sexual difference in order to accede to the male-gendered role of citizen and voter. Yet when women stepped out of their traditional sphere they were seen to usurp a male position and were no longer considered women.<sup>239</sup> And as the political individual's masculinity was defined and reinforced through female complementarity and otherness, the idea of women 'becoming' men led to accusations that the emancipation of women feminised and even emasculated men.<sup>240</sup> As universal suffrage for men in 1848 was nominally supposed to have eradicated social division, so suffrage for women was perceived by many as a leveller of sexual difference and female specificity.<sup>241</sup> Thus, as Proudhon had done in the late 1850s, social commentators saw the emancipated *femme nouvelle* as an anti-woman, as a monstrous, sexually indecipherable being. Republicanism was so deeply inflected by gender that when women attempted to enact its programme of political virtue, they were accused of violating nature, propriety and decency.<sup>242</sup> All legal reforms for

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<sup>239</sup> The writings of the prolific traditionalist, Catholic author Louise d'Alq (alias Mme d'Alquie de Rieuepeyroux) show a complete contrast to those of Auclert. Alq accepts woman's social and political status quo as justification for woman's inferiority: "La femme, ne pouvant être ni électeur, ni député, encore moins ministre, n'est pas apte à s'occuper de politique". Alq also deals with the idea of complementarity of the sexes and moral divorce within the couple (her conception of which is in complete contrast to that of Richer) in this domain: "c'est peut-être là qu'il faut chercher la cause de cet éloignement des hommes pour le sexe féminin; plus celui-ci cherche à ressembler au sexe fort, plus il l'éloigne par cette ressemblance qui annihile son principale charme. La femme ne doit donc s'aventurer en aucune façon sur le terrain de la politique." See Alq, *Essais pour l'éducation du sens moral. La science de la vie. La vie intime* (Paris: Bureaux des causeries familiales, n.d.), 41-2.

(Written during 1880s.)

<sup>240</sup> Bidelman, 116-22; Scott, 162-6.

<sup>241</sup> Scott, 102.

<sup>242</sup> Landes, 165.

women and social changes in women's status were seen to contribute to the emergence of the new woman, from secondary education, through the introduction of divorce, even to the invention of the bicycle which gave women a new mobility and a daring masculinised dress code and code of conduct.<sup>243</sup>

George Sand was a prominent figurehead for the female emancipation movement in 1848. She stressed that women had the same passions and needs as men, were ruled by the same physical laws, were subject to duty and to moral and social laws that were as difficult and severe as men's, and yet were judged less intelligent with a lesser capacity for reasoning, incapable of dominating their instincts, and to have a lesser free will and conscience than men.<sup>244</sup> Jeanne Deroin, therefore, exhorted Sand to represent women's interests in the National Assembly in order that the drawing up of the the new constitution not be left entirely to men because, for Deroin, Sand was an individual example of the sort of androgyny she wished to see in the ideal couple: "She has made herself man through her intelligence; she has remained woman through her maternal side, her infinite tenderness."<sup>245</sup> And yet by her action, Deroin evoked Sand's own unconventional lifestyle and highlighted all that which anti-emancipators feared women might become through the granting of political rights.

Michelet had judged woman's participation in politics as being above her capabilities. Legouvé, despite the reforms he demanded for women, was far from supporting suffrage for women, and in similar style to Michelet, used a coloured version of the political participation of high-profile women during the Revolution to argue that woman's intervention in politics had always been fatal and useless.<sup>246</sup> It was in the light of possible emancipatory change, however, that Proudhon's *justice* was most seriously called into question. Proudhon's concept was based on a socialist but phallocratic ideology, where woman was recognised as possessing no administrative or industrial genius, no legal sense, and being devoid of a philosophical mind. The extent to which Proudhon believed in natural differences

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<sup>243</sup> Silverman, 67, 72.

<sup>244</sup> Cited in Richer, 1872, 48-9.

<sup>245</sup> See Scott, 109. Scott claims that Sand rejected the proposition and harshly ridiculed the women who mooted it, arguing that women had no place in politics.

<sup>246</sup> Legouvé, 436-43.

and aptitudes between the sexes is displayed by a remark he made to Jeanne Deroin when she presented herself as a candidate in the 1849 legislative elections. He argued that a woman legislator was as absurd a concept as a male *nourrice*.<sup>247</sup> Deroin retorted by asking Proudhon precisely what organs were necessary for a legislator, highlighting the absurdity of his 'natural' arguments for women's exclusion.<sup>248</sup>

Any call for a share of man's political powers, legislative and judiciary authority was, therefore, an *injustice* and direct attack on Proudhon's system. Flaubert agreed with Proudhon (and Janet) that woman's understanding was too personal, relative and subjective to allow her to reason objectively in the political forum. In a letter to Ernest Feydeau in 1859, Flaubert cited Proudhon's phrase "Woman is the desolation of the righteous", approving it as a good reason for woman's general social subordination.<sup>249</sup> Proudhon believed that marriage could not co-exist with woman's emancipation. An equal couple ruled out all possibility of admiration, devotion, confidence, encouragement, protection and support; he could also not admit the possibility that a wife might be able to reverse her husband's vote or even vote differently from him. As in all areas, Proudhon saw this sort of equality of men and women in marriage as a wholly unnatural state, degrading the husband's virility.<sup>250</sup> Bader, in true conservative vein, later supported the inequality between men and women in the areas of duty, rights, morality, intelligence, passion, physical strength and also politics. For her, only when woman was proved as physically and intellectually strong as man, could her political emancipation go ahead. This process, spelling the humiliation of man for the benefit of woman, was unwanted by all 'normal' women, and was pure political manoeuvring by Third Republicans who wanted women out of the clutches of the conservative clergy.<sup>251</sup> She was, no doubt, right up to a certain point, for Dumas *fils*, like Hubertine Auclert, noted that the more

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<sup>247</sup> 'Nourrice', meaning children's nanny but also wet nurse.

<sup>248</sup> Scott, 113-4.

<sup>249</sup> Steegmuller (ed.), 189-90.

<sup>250</sup> Proudhon, 1875, 59. The distance between a married couple manifested in such an action, seemed a good reason to start divorce proceedings in Proudhon's opinion.

<sup>251</sup> Bader, 453-60.

women became interested in politics, the less interested they would be in the Church's 'propaganda'.<sup>252</sup>

Thus, the old adage that women lacked creativity due to their lack of a generative and virile mind which naturally excluded them from politics remained prevalent and almost as hard to overcome as the idea of a clerically-influenced female electorate. Lamber and d'Héricourt attacked the identification of the Revolutionary political individual as male, Lamber reminding Proudhon, who had spent three long volumes defending the Revolution and *justice*, that 'Tous les français sont égaux devant la loi.'<sup>253</sup> But those who conflated political emancipation and social and sexual freedom stressed that women who proclaimed their political liberty neglected their familial duty and thus the role assigned to them under the doctrine of separate spheres.<sup>254</sup> D'Héricourt seized upon this idea and vociferously demanded an explanation as to why anti-emancipators insisted on confusing liberty and licence, and why, if liberty and equality had made men noble, they would render women ugly and obnoxious. Women were demanding liberty, accompanied by all the rights and duties liberty implied, but did not want the ultra-liberal freedom of choice and will implied by licence.<sup>255</sup> Although Maria Deraismes never openly called for female suffrage and disliked Auclert's militant activism, she did come round to the idea of suffrage for women and increasingly sided with liberal feminism and its demands for integral reform and equality based on individualism rather than difference.<sup>256</sup> Deraismes believed those Third Republicans who thought that universal suffrage and equality

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<sup>252</sup> Dumas *films*, 1880, 210. Dumas *films* also noted, however, woman's general apathy in respect of the suffrage movement. Women of the lower social classes had better, more pressing things to think about; Christian women had come to accept their sacrifice; others had resolved immediate problems in their own way; and even more were not prepared to criticise that which they already possessed. The upper and educated classes could not be counted upon either, since for them, suffrage was not necessarily a public issue. D'Héricourt (cited in Richer, 1872, 36-7) saw female apathy rather as the result of male conditioning. As woman's lack of education, that had generally been substituted by a strong sentiment of self-sacrifice, did nothing to arouse her inertia to change her situation, man necessarily believed that the job of subordination that he had extremely well accomplished was, actually, woman's natural state.

<sup>253</sup> Lamber, 125-30.

<sup>254</sup> Laurichesse, 270-3.

<sup>255</sup> D'Héricourt, 1, 454; 2, 24-33.

<sup>256</sup> Bidelman (86-7) notes, however, that the reforms she supported continually fell short of her liberal, integral feminist demands. Deraismes and Richer differed over the suffrage issue during the 1880s and as Deraismes swung more in favour of political emancipation, Richer stepped up his attacks against it (Bidelman, xvii). Deraismes even allowed her name to go forward as a candidate in a 'shadow' legislative election campaign in 1885, masterminded by Auclert, whilst making it clear that she would not actively campaign for votes. See Bidelman, 131; McMillan, 191.



would stop at only half of human society to be extremely naive and their arguments against female emancipation to be contradictory to their ideological beliefs.<sup>257</sup> Indeed, the paradox inherent in lay Third-Republican civic instruction is no more apparent than in relation to political participation. Women were encouraged to take an interest in politics, defined as “nothing more than contemporary history”, but were not allowed to express their beliefs in public, and if their opinions differed from those of their husbands, republican morality enforced silence on women.<sup>258</sup> Maria Deraismes also criticised men for their belief that in granting women rights they were in danger of losing their own. But this notion was embedded in the idea of complementarity and the reciprocal effect any change to one half of the balance could have on the other.

Political emancipation for women, therefore, was construed throughout the nineteenth century as fostering sexual freedom and licence. As soon as women transgressed the social norm dictated for them by men, they were perceived, particularly by Proudhon, to have rejected all female modesty and to have liberated themselves from sexual mores: men seemed to judge women by the male figure of the bourgeois moral double standard which demanded young women to be pure but expected young men to have ‘sown their wild oats’ in other social strata before marriage.<sup>259</sup>

Alongside the notion of political emancipation, the reforms of women’s education resulted in growing numbers of socially active and financially independent women. During the 1890s, the curriculum of girls’ education based on women’s natural

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<sup>257</sup> Deraismes, 1872, 60-71.

<sup>258</sup> See Mme Henry Gréville, *Instruction morale et civique des jeunes filles* (Paris: E. Weill & G. Maurice éditeurs, 1882), 175. This monograph was widely read and often reprinted (reaching its 29<sup>th</sup> edition in 1891) for it figured on the list of works supplied without charge by the Parisian council to its communal schools. The work is interesting in that the first half is concerned with republican moral and civic instruction of an ideological nature whereas the second half is dedicated to woman’s specific social position. Thus, the gulf between Third Republican ‘citizen’—his rights and duties— and ‘woman’ is all the more visible. Indeed, the second section of the book reads as pure, (male) Third-Republican propaganda: “Maternity raised woman’s moral status”; “In marriage, woman is subordinate to man”; “Modesty, reserve and decency are indispensable virtues for women”; “Woman is the keeper of the home” etc.

<sup>259</sup> Offen, 1986, 464. This opinion was possibly influenced by Saint Simonian ideology and particularly Prosper Enfantin’s ideas on female self-government which were generally perceived as an

aptitudes and their narrowly and sexually defined social roles was challenged, and with the 1902 reform of the *baccalauréat*, many more women found themselves in a position to be able to pass the diploma which opened access to universities and higher education. And yet, by giving girls a public education away from their homes and families, republican reforms were perceived to have produced, despite strong reassurance and arguments to the contrary, a generation of women, often with dissipated morals, unwilling to fulfil their social duty as republican wives and mothers.

The cult of republican motherhood became exaggerated in the face of worrying demographic statistics which were exacerbated by a lingering sense of national impotence stemming from France's defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870, the ensuing Paris Commune and the German annexation of Moselle and Alsace. The low population figures were seen to be the result of a declining rate of marriages and Malthusian practices among married couples that saw the fecundity of married French women drop by 43% between 1861 and 1931, and contrasted markedly with the steadily growing and strong empires of Germany and Great Britain.<sup>260</sup> Whilst Dartigues believed that women's interest in politics, social economy and civil issues could only strengthen and regenerate the family and, therefore, society,<sup>261</sup> he also reviewed the dangers that the over-education of women could present: the bodies of developed brains became sterile, an effect that the frail female constitution resisted less well than the male.<sup>262</sup> Dartigues's opinion echoed that of Proudhon: acute stimulation of the female brain affected the quality and quantity of a mother's breast milk. Thus educated women ranked their vain pride above the wellbeing of their progeny, and risked endangering the lives of their children.<sup>263</sup> Although such ideas might seem extreme, they were widely held in French society: through fear that exercised brains could damage a woman's reproductive organs, and in the light of the

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apology for promiscuity, and which cast a long shadow over the female emancipation movement in France.

<sup>260</sup> Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 23, 89-90. Offen (1983, 263) notes that despite the demographic figures of 1890-1 which recorded the falling marriage rate, France nevertheless retained one of the highest marriage rates in the industrial world.

<sup>261</sup> Dartigues, 68.

<sup>262</sup> Dartigues, 40-50.

<sup>263</sup> Proudhon, 1858, 359.

low demographic figures, the hours assigned to the more intellectually demanding sections of the curriculum in girls' lycées were cut down in 1897.<sup>264</sup> Not only was Dartigues worried that a woman's physical capacities might be undermined through education, he was concerned also that educated women lost the two most endearing feminine qualities: naivety and modesty. Similarly, Charles Turgeon, influential law professor and critic of feminism, was worried that developed intelligence in women would destroy their natural tenderness and emotion—precisely the qualities that made women 'real women'.<sup>265</sup> Thus by mastering her emotionality, Turgeon implied that educated woman neutered herself and rendered herself sterile. By the mid 1890s therefore, demographic concerns had become the hobbyhorse of nationalists who became aggressive defenders of long-standing patriarchal values.<sup>266</sup>

### Fin de Siècle

At the end of the nineteenth century, men's sphere, with its growing economic and political powerbase, seemed vastly more powerful in relation to women's sphere of activity than ever before.<sup>267</sup> Men were thus even more prepared to protect their privilege with all the arms that modern society provided them with. In a growing misogynistic climate, women who did not conform to the ideal figure of intelligent motherhood were considered as non-women, as deviant, their deviancy in any sphere—social, intellectual, political, familial, criminal—being portrayed as sexual. With advances in medical science, reasons physiological, more often gynaecological, and later psychological were given for such degeneracy. Indeed, the burgeoning school of neuropsychiatry in France during the 1880s tended to link gynaecology and psychology, for the degeneracy caused by the mental illnesses of neurasthenia and hysteria were seen to be the result of sexual aetiologies.<sup>268</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, eminent and prominent psychiatrist at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris, was perhaps

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<sup>264</sup> Offen, 1983, 259-60.

<sup>265</sup> On Charles Turgeon, *Le féminisme français*, 2 vols., (Paris: L. Larose, 1902), see Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 100-2.

<sup>266</sup> Offen, 1984, 659-61. Figures such as Gustave LeBon and, later, Théodore Joran deplored the effects women's education and emancipation had had on France's demography. The conservative pro-natalist nationalist movement provoked the foundation of Paul Robin's *Ligue de régénération humaine* as part of a neo-Malthusian anarchist movement which propagandised birth control as a weapon against the state.

<sup>267</sup> Offen, 1986, 482.

<sup>268</sup> See Gilman, chapter nine, 191-216.

the most influential doctor of his time to posit such theories. But Charcot also moved in literary circles, mixing with Alphonse Daudet, Ivan Tourgeniev and the Goncourt brothers.<sup>269</sup> Edmond de Goncourt, Paul Bourget, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Hippolyte Taine and Emile Zola took up the theme of individual degeneracy gleaned from Charcot's research and attributed it to the whole nation, even to the whole of western European civilisation, diagnosing modern society as artificial and degenerate.<sup>270</sup>

During the 1880s, similar images of national depravity were spread by the rapidly expanding popular press of newfound freedom of expression which revelled in scandals and stories of corruption and crime.<sup>271</sup> Elitist and artistic circles were permeated by a sense of horror and disgust of contemporary society, of real life, of the intellectual limitations and banality of the engulfing masses in an increasingly democratic society.<sup>272</sup> Fleeing this harsh and brittle reality, many French artists and intellectuals sought refuge in the arts (as Schopenhauer had done),<sup>273</sup> the artificial, the indirect, the dream world, the refinement of sensations, in drugs, occultism and mysticism.<sup>274</sup> In contrast to positivist thinkers who equated irrational faith with ignorance, 'decadents', by championing a sense of mysticism, could believe in the unknown and the occult, given that modern science allowed for a perspective of

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<sup>269</sup> Léon Daudet, the author's son and later social critic, was a pupil of Charcot's. Jean-François Six, *1886 : Naissance du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 126.

<sup>270</sup> Eugen Weber, *Fin de siècle: La France à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, trans. Philippe Delamore (Paris, 1986), 38. This monograph is a translation of the aforementioned *France, Fin de Siècle* but with certain amendments and supplementary material. Hereafter, I shall refer to the French translation as Weber, vf., and to the original as Weber, vo. See also Silverman, 80.

<sup>271</sup> Six, 110; Weber, vf., 41-6.

<sup>272</sup> Weber, vf., 50-1; vo., 24. Intellectual mediocrity in both theology and philosophy, political scandal and opportunism, the industrialisation of urban areas prompting a rural exodus were all diagnosed as symptoms of national decadence. See Six, 138.

<sup>273</sup> Extracts of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* were published in French as *Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation* from 1880 onwards, the whole work appearing in translation in 1886 and again in 1890 by A. Burdeau who had also translated Schopenhauer's *Pensées, maximes et fragments* in 1880. See Ferdinand Brunetière, 'Revue littéraire. La Philosophie de Schopenhauer et les conséquences du pessimisme. « Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation », traduction de M. A. Burdeau, Paris, 1888-1890 ; F. Alcan.', *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1 November 1890, 210-21; Gérard Peylet, *La littérature fin de siècle de 1884 à 1898: Entre décadentisme et modernité*, Série Thémathèque Lettres (Paris: Vuibert, 1994), 23; Six, 148.

<sup>274</sup> Jean Pierrot, *Le Rêve*, Univers de Lettres Bordas, Recueil thématique (Paris: Bordas, 1985), 97. (First published in 1972.) Also Séverine Jouve, *Obsessions et perversions dans la littérature et les demeures à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle*, Collection Savoir: Lettres (Paris: Hermann, 1996), 47-53. Even the work of writers and artists identified with the realist and naturalist movements (and particularly Emile Zola) often betrayed a fascination for these sorts of subjects, ideas and atmospheres.

humanity's position in the universe as infinitely minute.<sup>275</sup> Treated as one moral philosophy among other mythical philosophies, Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, had been divested of its mystery and situated within an evolution of religious beliefs throughout the history of humanity.<sup>276</sup> Thus it was not only Christian mysticism that saw its popularity surge, but also a new era of esoteric cults was inaugurated. These *fin-de-siècle* issues of deviancy and degeneration, mysticism and the workings of the human unconscious, and their erotic nature and significance are all treated in Massenet's operas *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs*. The world of perverse, erotic dreams will be explored in later chapters in relation to the characters of Hérode and Athanaël, whilst the interrelated ideas of religious mysticism, sexual emancipation and hysteria for women are examined through the portrayal of Thaïs.

As early as the 1860s, progressive theologians and/or conservative republicans had hoped for a reunification of rationalism and dogma. But the renewed form of religious mysticism was born of both positivism and science, and at the same time of a rejection of their findings, which were shunned as a dry creed to make way for a resurgence of belief in a spiritual dimension to human existence.<sup>277</sup> Advances on Charcot's theories of the unconscious by physicians and philosophers such as Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud included the admission of psychological factors to the cause of mental neuroses, which challenged the notions of physical deviancy held by positivist and rationalist thinkers. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, therefore, previously dominant philosophical ideas, born of the Enlightenment and which had engendered scientific discovery, were increasingly called into question as viable motors for modern society.

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<sup>275</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, "Introduction", *Romantisme – Décadence*, 42 (1983), 3-8, at 7; Jean Pierrot, *L'imaginaire décadent 1880-1900* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977), 105.

<sup>276</sup> Pierrot, 1977, 104. Ernest Renan's extensive research into religious history was exemplary of this process.

<sup>277</sup> During the 1890s, Marie Dugard (112-5), professor at the Lycée Molière, nevertheless, explained human desire for knowledge as divinely inspired and respectful of God's creation and laws, implying that scientific research could not be anti-religious. Her wish to reunite modern philosophy and religion was an uncomfortable one, however, for she could not deny that religious 'truths' remained subject to doubt because they could not be scientifically reasoned and, therefore, depended on faith (358).

## In Conclusion

In the wake of the devoutly Catholic Second Empire,<sup>278</sup> the Third Republic had forged ahead with its break up of the Church's privileges, submitting the clergy to state authority in order to rid politics, legislation, education and administration of clerical influence. The state intended to set a shining secular example by its impartiality and efficiency in all these domains. Philosophy, scholarship, science and industry had come too far to accept divine authority, and those weary of the Church's opposition to new ideas and clerical control looked to the new Republic for solutions. The preoccupation of politicians, economists, industrialists and moralists alike was to rebuild the nation and make it strong again, although their ideas as how to achieve this goal differed wildly. From Renan and Flaubert (who disagreed with universal suffrage, preferring an intellectual elite to form the ruling class), to the socialist Proudhon (who militantly demanded social and economic reform for men at least); from the anticlerical Michelet (who wanted to rid people's everyday lives of clerical interference) to Mgr. Dupanloup (who applied himself to improving woman's daily life whilst reinforcing the Church's traditional patriarchal position), nearly all political and ideological persuasions saw the benefits of a traditional family organisation as a way to rejuvenate France's homes and, therefore, society.

And yet by the mid 1890s, all these efforts were seen to have resulted in a degenerate society. The dynamism and cosmopolitanism of the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle lay far behind French society which turned inwards to look to republican achievement and where it was leading, the evolutionary notion of progress held dear by positivist Republicans giving way to its implicit idea of ultimate decline. Despite the explicit and implicit efforts of the Church and state to reinforce the subordination of women, the female emancipation movement had made progress, and in doing so, had become one of the scapegoats for the nation's degeneracy. Radical women and feminist campaigners had spoken up for woman, for her intelligence and autonomy, for her identical morality and destiny to that of man as a human individual, for her rights to equal education and employment, as well as her right to equal respect and

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<sup>278</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945*, 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1002: Napoléon III's government had spent twice as much on its religious budget as it had done on education, and had allowed the Church freedom of expression when censorship had reigned in most other sectors of society.

treatment before the law in all areas of daily and married life, in parallel to the liberation, democratisation and improvement of society in general. But as the emancipated *femme nouvelle* occupied an increasingly large sector of public life, her travesty of the sphere allotted to her through her sexual difference lead to accusations of the masculinisation of women and, complementarily, to the feminisation of men. Fin-de-siècle men seemed to need to exorcise their fears of emasculation, often doing so by rendering woman diabolical and by desecrating her sexual body. Thus in the growing nationalist climate of the *fin de siècle*, the new woman created intense feelings of fear and vulnerability among France's men, who clung to Mary and Marianne as the (female) symbols of Republican and Catholic patriarchy, whilst that other icon, the *femme nouvelle* became the object of a tidal wave of anti-feminist criticism.

## Chapter Two

### *Le Prêtre, la Femme et la Famille*

Massenet firmly established his name in Parisian circles at the start of the Third Republic with two dramatic oratorios which dealt with love, betrayal, honesty and Christian faith in a human context: *Marie-Magdeleine* (1873) and *Eve* (1875).<sup>1</sup> The former work, styled as a 'sacred drama' in three acts, was structurally dramatic in conception,<sup>2</sup> and presented a humanist portrayal of a caring Christ and repentant sinner, a story of Christian poetry and love, rather than Christian faith. The oratorio's libretto by Louis Gallet was sober: Jesus encourages Mary Magdalene to turn to God who will welcome her like the lost sheep; Jesus predicts his future resurrection. Massenet's musical language remained homophonic and diatonic, with only a touch of human sensuality as Jesus delivered his message to Mary Magdalene in a duet which nevertheless resembled an operatic love duet for tenor and soprano voices. The composer Ernest Reyer praised the score as having succeeded in fusing artistic talent with religious conviction in the style of Bach and Handel, those pillars of the sacred oratorio repertoire, and the influential critic Camille Bellaigue believed Massenet to have struck the perfect balance of expression, considering the Act II duet between Jesus and Mary Magdalene to represent the height of Christian tenderness and chastity expressed in music.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 1896, Eduard Hanslick wrote of Massenet's *Eve*: "Der „Eva“ gestehen wir Esprit höchstens in der engeren französischen Bedeutung zu; der Geist, der die Bibel begreift und sie mit urkräftigem Leben durchbringt, ist daran nicht zu erkennen. Massenet hat sich auch gehütet, sein feines graziöses Talent zu dem Wuchs oratorischen Stiles zu strecken, etwa Händel, Haydn oder Mendelssohn nacheifernd; was er beabsichtigt, ist offenbar nichts anderes als eine biblische Idylle, ein paradiesisches Familienstück — leider mit unglücklichen Ausgang. Daß Massenet, wie alle Franzosen, überall theatralisch denkt und fühlt, beweist nicht bloß der Charakter seiner Musik, sondern obendrein die scenische Anweisung vor jeder der drei Abteilungen." See "„Eva“ von Massenet — „Sieg der Zeit und der Wahrheit“ von Händel", *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts (1895-1899)* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1899), 179-186, at 180-1. For a recent detailed study of Massenet's oratorios see Erik W. Goldstrom, *A Whore in Paradise: The Oratorios of Jules Massenet*, Doctoral thesis, Stanford University, June 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The oratorio, whose score included stage directions, was, indeed, produced as an opera in Nice in 1903 and then again at the Opéra-Comique in 1906. For details of the work's reception, and commentary of Massenet's musical style for sacred works, largely inherited from Gounod, refer to Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30-6.

<sup>3</sup> See Huebner, 35. Huebner also notes how the press reception evolved, for in 1887, the same Ernest Reyer qualified the score as 'plus amoureuse que chrétienne'. Huebner explains this change of opinion as a new reading of the oratorio through the optic of the reception of *Hérodiade* and *Manon*. Yet Camille Bellaigue, even in 1893, believed the oratorio to be Massenet's masterpiece. See Bellaigue, *Psychologie musicale* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1893), 50-8.



In 1881, Massenet became the first composer to bring the story of Salome and John the Baptist to the lyric stage with his opera *Hérodiade*.<sup>4</sup> To do so was a relative risk, for biblical subjects remained appropriate and acceptable in oratorio, but novel and controversial in the theatre. Regeneration of interest in this biblical tale came not only from the 1877 publication of Gustave Flaubert's 'conte' *Hérodias*, but also other literary sources such as Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*<sup>5</sup> or Bible retellings such as Clarisse Bader's *La Femme biblique* (1866) and, most importantly, Renan's *La Vie de Jésus*. Fine art sources included Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's *La Décollation de saint Jean-Baptiste* (1869) which was quickly followed by Henri Regnault's *Salomé* and Gustave Moreau's series of paintings on the legend of the death of John the Baptist.<sup>6</sup> The opera tells the story of the Tetrarch Herod Antipas and his wife Herodias, and their struggle for power and position as rulers of Galilee and Perea under the Roman domination of Caesar Tiberius. More importantly, the opera depicts the history of the first Christian martyr, John the Baptist, and Salome. However, the opera's scenario radically changes the original bible tale, for Salomé is a dancer at the Antipas court who is unaware of her parentage, having been abandoned by her mother as a child. The portrayal of Jean Baptiste is also novel, for Jean wears the mask of a seductive holy man whose feelings for Salomé, his disciple, finally triumph over his faith immediately before his decapitation.<sup>7</sup>

In addressing the subject of *Hérodiade*, Massenet was interested in the human side of the story—particularly the love interest within a religious context—apparently asking the librettist Paul Milliet to “write him a short love poem ‘with a little mysticism and a lot of passion’”.<sup>8</sup> Thus Massenet's librettists turned Flaubert's proto-decadent story into a much softer focused, but more blasphemous scenario: Salomé is in love with Jean-Baptiste who, after expressing little unselfish Christian sentiment, gives into his

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*, based on the play by Oscar Wilde, was première in Dresden in 1905, and seen in Paris in 1907.

<sup>5</sup> Mallarmé died before completing this work. The only fragment to be published during his lifetime was a dialogue scene, appearing in *Le Parnasse contemporain* in 1870 under the title “Fragment d'une étude scénique ancienne d'un poème d'*Hérodiade*”.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Regnault's *Salomé* dates from 1870 and Gustave Moreau's *Salomé dansant devant Hérode*, 1875; *L'Apparition*, 1876; *Salomé au jardin* 1878.

<sup>7</sup> A full synopsis of the opera can be found in Appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Milliet, ‘Théâtre national de l'Opéra Comique : « Werther »’, *L'Art du Théâtre*, 31, July 1903, 106-8, at 106.

carnal desires to possess Salomé. Like Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, the opera concentrated rather on painting the image of a human man, warts and all, behind the divine legend. In the same way that Renan strips Jesus of his divinity, Jean is given the status of a prophet, but a highly fallible one. Whilst it is difficult to establish Massenet's and his librettists' actual familiarity with Renan's texts, Renan's humanisation of biblical characters and spiritual realism pervaded French religious understanding at this time. The press had, indeed, linked Massenet and Renan and their similarity of expression as early as 1875, following the première of Massenet's oratorio *Eve*.<sup>9</sup> In similar vein, *Hérodiade* was seen to underscore a particular view of the biblical story and its characters which was influenced by the social, historical and political context of the Third Republic.

Salomé, devoted to Jean and his cause, and Hérodiade, a political activist of dubious moral character, conform to the Mary and Marianne stereotypes posited by Michelet and absorbed by the French public imagination during the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, the notions of emancipation and divorce for women are represented through the opera's characterisation of Hérodiade. The relationship between Hérodiade and Salomé also allows for exploration of the nineteenth century's cult of motherhood. The chastity of *Marie-Magdeleine* is left behind in *Hérodiade* which displays a saint tempted from the righteous path and a degree of mystical eroticism in both the libretto and music. Jean Baptiste is represented anticlerically and identified with clerical fallibility. At the same time, his sensuality and corruption mark him out as decadent.<sup>10</sup> With *Hérodiade*, therefore, Massenet and his librettists not only made an anticlerical statement but also broke the mould for opera based on biblical themes and transgressed the unwritten laws of theatrical representation of religious characters. The aim of this chapter is to examine the way in which these issues, highly pertinent in France at the beginning of the 1880s, are worked through in the libretto, the music, and the reception of this biblical opera.

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<sup>9</sup> See Goldstrom, 31-50, 68, 204, who cites Octave Fouque in *La Revue et Gazette musicale* of 21 March 1875. Goldstrom evokes the direct correlations between Renan's description of Nazareth and characterisation of Jesus in *La Vie de Jésus* and Louis Gallet's libretto for *Marie-Magdeleine*.

<sup>10</sup> Wider social and artistic acceptance of the decadent aesthetic, which will be discussed in chapter three, only came towards the end of the 1880s.

## The Genesis of *Hérodiade*

The history of the genesis of the opera's libretto is far from clear. Demar Irvine, basing his research on the Ricordi Archives, explains that Giulio Ricordi had snapped up the rights to Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, which had had its enormously successful Italian première as *Il Re di Lahore* in Turin on 13 February 1878.<sup>11</sup> Whilst preparing the Italian version of this opera, Ricordi commissioned a new libretto from Angelo Zanardini with Massenet in mind. Zanardini based his text on *Hérodias*, one of Flaubert's recently published *Trois Contes*. Massenet, receiving a brief preliminary scenario of *Erodiade* from Zanardini as early as 9 January 1878, set about composing the vocal score in November of that year. Irvine more or less trusts Arthur Pougin's 1912 account of the opera's genesis, claiming the prior existence of an Italian libretto by Zanardini to which Massenet allegedly wrote his music. Pougin states that this Italian libretto was then translated into French and adapted by Paul Milliet and Henri Grémont (alias Georges Hartmann, Massenet's publisher), and the French version of the opera thus involved important modifications in the score composed to the Italian libretto.<sup>12</sup> Ernest Reyer also mentions an original Italian libretto and refers to the French version as a translation; the same is true for Johannes Weber who stated that Massenet originally composed his music to this Italian libretto. Both critics, however, admit to ignorance regarding changes made to the French libretto and modifications made to Massenet's score.<sup>13</sup> And yet in his 1903 interview, Paul Milliet claimed that Massenet had asked him for the libretto at the time of the première of *Le Roi de Lahore*, and that he delivered the finished article to Hartmann, together with whom he travelled to Milan to present the libretto to Ricordi, who is nevertheless credited with having commissioned the work from Massenet in the first place.<sup>14</sup> Giulio Ricordi's own doubt over how to present the

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<sup>11</sup> Demar Irvine, *Massenet. A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 97-119.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Pougin, 'Massenet', *Rivista musicale Italiana*, XIX, 1912, 945.

<sup>13</sup> Ernest Reyer, 'Revue Musicale', *Journal des Débats*, 25 December 1881; Johannes Weber, 'Critique Musicale' Feuilleton du Temps, *Le Temps*, 4 January 1882. Irvine, however, cites a letter from Massenet to Ricordi of 22 December 1880, in which Massenet requests to see the Italian translation before the work is engraved in order to make any necessary musical adjustments. If Massenet had originally composed his music to the Italian text this citation becomes problematic for Massenet would not have needed to edit the score. The possibility remains that Massenet was referring to a "re-translation" of the revised French libretto.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Milliet, 'Théâtre national de l'Opéra Comique : « Werther »', *L'Art du Théâtre*, 31, July 1903, 106-8, at 106.

librettists on the title page of the libretto is also apparent in a letter sent to Hartmann in November 1881, for Ricordi writes:

For the Italian edition I can put that which you propose: Melodramma di A. Zanardini = versione francese di P. Millet [sic] = or: Melodramma di A. Zanardini e Paolo Millet [sic] – but what shall we do with the third librettist?..... two names are already too many on the Italian libretto – the third one should have his head cut off, like Jokanaan –<sup>15</sup>

Whilst undecided over the designation of Milliet's part in the libretto's creation, Ricordi mischievously suggests cutting (and, indeed, decapitating, like John the Baptist) Henri Grémont from the acknowledgements, knowing full well the real identity of the elusive Grémont.

Whatever the exact chronology of events, it seems that a French version of the libretto was made at an early stage and used by Massenet in the compositional process; the autograph score gives only a French text.<sup>16</sup> Irvine affirms that Massenet was occupied with the orchestration of *Hérodiade* between January and September 1880.<sup>17</sup> He also notes that the correspondence between Massenet, Hartmann and Ricordi distinctly cooled during the spring of 1880, and that whilst Massenet was hoping for a La Scala première of *Erodiade* in early 1881, Ricordi's attention was directed towards a different première for the 1880 winter season, that of another biblical opera, Ponchielli's *Il Figliuol prodigo*.<sup>18</sup> The opera was, in fact, premièred at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels on 19 December 1881.<sup>19</sup> It seems likely that, during the spring/summer of 1881, *Hérodiade* was proposed to the Paris Opéra director, Auguste Emmanuel Vaucorbeil, who rejected it. Vaucorbeil's refusal of the

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<sup>15</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter B.n.F.), Musique, l.a. RICORDI, Giulio, dated Milan, 23 November 1881: "Pour l'édition italienne je peux mettre ce que vous me proposez: Melodramma di A. Zanardini = versione francese di P. Millet [sic] = ou: Melodramma di A. Zanardini e Paolo Millet [sic] – Mais que faisons-nous du troisième parolier?..... sur le libretto italien deux noms sont déjà de trop – il faut couper la tête au troisième, comme à Jokanna [sic] -"

<sup>16</sup> B.n.F., Opéra, Rés. A. 736 a (I-IV). Having not found the original autograph vocal score, I am unable to clarify further whether Massenet's first version of the work was composed to Zanardini's Italian libretto.

<sup>17</sup> Irvine, 114, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Irvine, 117. Massenet most fastidiously dated his autograph manuscripts, particularly at the beginnings and ends of sections, but often at the start of a new day's work also, and his dates are reliable. The autograph full score of *Hérodiade* bears dates ranging from January 1880 to February 1882, the bulk of the work, however, being completed by September 1880 but with major reworkings and new sections added in May and June of 1881. Ricordi's supposed engraving of what appears to be a far from complete full score in December 1880 (see Irvine, 119), is thus called into question. Irvine then notes a hiatus in the available Massenet-Ricordi correspondence during the whole of 1881, leaving the wranglings that brought *Erodiade* to Milan only in February 1882 a mystery. Indeed, perhaps the Massenet-Ricordi correspondence cooled because Ricordi suggested extensive changes to the score or because Massenet decided to make such alterations.

opera, based on his view that the libretto was “incendiaire”, due to its depiction of Jean Baptiste giving in to his carnal desires for Salomé, was widely circulated in the Parisian press. Louis Schneider, however, remarks that Vaucorbeil also suggested that the libretto needed the attentions of a “carcassier”, someone to reconstruct it, perhaps hinting that the name of Paul Milliet did not carry enough weight for the Opéra.<sup>20</sup> The opera was also offered to Léon Carvalho, the director of the Opéra Comique, as early as August 1880, for on two pages of the autograph full score, Massenet refers to Carvalho and that he was “waiting for an Opéra/Opéra comique solution”, dated 30 May 1881.<sup>21</sup> But the opera’s subject material seems to have been too controversial for the Parisian operatic directors to make a quick decision, and by August 1881, Oscar Stoumon and Edouard Calabrési of La Monnaie had offered to stage the opera.<sup>22</sup> Paris’s ‘refusal’ to mount *Hérodiade* no doubt worked to the benefit and success of the opera: trains were chartered especially to carry critics and spectators from Paris to Brussels, creating an unusual and much publicised media event. The Brussels première of *Hérodiade* in December 1881 was a huge success, followed just over three months later by the Milan première on 23 February 1882. Massenet refused Carvalho’s offer, in December 1881, to stage *Hérodiade* at the Opéra Comique following the opera’s success in Brussels,<sup>23</sup> and this biblical opera was performed in Paris in its Italian version at the Théâtre des Italiens only on 1 February 1884.

### A Brief History of Biblical Opera

Whilst still nuncio in Spain, Pope Clement IX composed an opera *Le Comica del Cielo* which was performed in Rome with sets by Gianlorenzo Bernini after his

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<sup>19</sup> A large part of the French press seemed to ignore or discount the work’s Italian beginnings for this very reason.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Schneider, *Massenet 1842-1912*, Second edition (of his *Massenet: L’homme, le musicien* of 1908, without illustrations), (Paris: A. Carteret, 1926), 75-6. Cited in Irvine, 117. I have been unable, as yet, to trace the “procès verbaux” in the Opéra Archives on the subject of *Hérodiade*. Jean-Christophe Branger claims that Vaucorbeil refused to mount operas whose librettists were without public renown. See Jean-Christophe Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet ou le crépuscule de l’opéra-comique* (Metz: Editions Serpenoise, 1999), 43.

<sup>21</sup> B.n.F., Opéra, Rés. A. 736 a (III), folio 445: “samedi 28 août/80 [...] hier visite à Carvalho – belle impression musique Hérodiade.” B.n.F., Opéra, Rés. A. 736 a (II), folio 335: “J’attends solution opéra et opéra comique”.

<sup>22</sup> See the exchange of letters between Stoumon and Calabrési and Massenet published in *Le Figaro* of 5 August 1881.

<sup>23</sup> See Branger, 45.

elevation to the tiara in 1668.<sup>24</sup> But as the seventeenth century drew to a close in France, the clergy began to operate a separation between the Church and the theatre. Bossuet's 1694 monograph *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie*, with its strong disapproval of the stage, completed the rupture and dealt a heavy blow to the common moral perception of the theatrical profession which widely influenced the profession's civic status in France throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Only for the Jesuit community did theatre remain a way to communicate and instil moral values, particularly in the young, as long as it avoided all sexual innuendo and, indeed, displayed only one gender on stage.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the Jesuit writers played a significant role in theatrical life and constituted the voice of reconciliation between the Catholic faith and the theatre throughout the eighteenth century by arguing that reform could render the theatre morally useful. Abbé Claude Boyer defended biblical drama, writing a *Judith*, and Abbé Pierre de Villiers wrote musical comedies and defended the Opéra.<sup>27</sup> Abbé Pellegrin even composed hymns to be sung to tunes from well-known operas and vaudevilles as well as obtaining public celebrity for his libretti to Montéclair's *Jephté* (1732) and Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733). Jesuit sacred and biblical oratorios were often performed in the 'Concerts spirituels' which were established in 1725 to prolong the musical season during the three-week closure of theatres and concert halls over the Easter period.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the Parisian public welcomed Christian drama in a staged format. The Napoleonic campaign to Egypt and the team of researchers sent to document ancient history and modern life in Egypt and the Near East had stimulated French interest in the biblical lands and their geographical and historical specificity. A resurgence of Catholicism, in the wake of harsh anticlerical repression during the Revolutionary years and following the 1801 Concordat signed by Napoléon and the Pope, was accompanied by Chateaubriand's

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<sup>24</sup> John McManners, *Abbés and Actresses: The Church and the Theatrical Profession in Eighteenth-Century France*, The Zaharoff Lecture for 1985-6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>25</sup> McManners, 1.

<sup>26</sup> McManners (14) notes the naïvety of many Jesuit plays and cites the example of the 'Robertins', seminarists at Saint Sulpice, who liberally transformed Voltaire's tragedies into supposedly austere, single-sex, homo-erotic, 'moral' tales. For further detail on Jesuit theatre and its educational use, see his *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> McManners, 1986, 16-8. The Opéra was a less tricky subject to defend than the spoken theatre as opera players were exempt from the Church's ban on the theatrical profession due to their constituting an 'Académie' and being under royal patronage.

influential *Génie du Christianisme* (1802) which posited a mystical and artistic view of the Christian religion that went on to influence Romantic artists and writers such as Victor Hugo. The cultural climate was thus favourable to Old Testament drama; New Testament stories, invariably revolving around the character and depiction of Christ, were ideologically unthinkable and unworkable due to censorship.<sup>28</sup> From 1800 onwards, therefore, biblical forefathers began to appear more regularly on Parisian lyric stages. In 1803, Kalkbrenner and Lachnith produced *Saül*, an oratorio 'mis en action' during Passion week,<sup>29</sup> and in 1807, Méhul premièred his opera *Joseph* at the Opéra-Comique, with a libretto drawn from the book of Genesis. Like eighteenth-century Jesuit plays, the opera emphasised the moral rectitude of the title character and the piety of the Israelites. Religious values were austere conveyed by a scenario which avoided any love intrigue, and a musical setting which included a *cappella* vocal writing, homophonic, hymn-like textures and fugato sections. Few solo arias were attributed to the principal characters—only Joseph and his youngest brother Benjamin were given simple arias that reflect their innocence and goodness—and the preeminence of choruses lent emphasis to a collective response to the moral content of the story rather than individual concerns. Indeed, however dramatic operas such as *Joseph* or Le Sueur's *La Mort d'Adam* (1809) or Kreutzer's *La Mort d'Abel* (1810) were—both of which were premièred at the Opéra—these early attempts to dramatise the Bible conformed to standard Christian morality—any wrongdoing was used to serve a moral lesson—and remained in the style of oratorio, often being performed as such. It seems that it was not until Rossini's and Meyerbeer's portrayal of religious subjects, with their inherent dramatic possibilities, that the individualistic response to moral concerns was fully exploited.

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<sup>28</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to both David Charlton and Elizabeth Bartlet for my understanding of the cultural issues in this period.

<sup>29</sup> This drama used a pot pourri of sacred and secular music by composers such as Mozart, Haydn and Cimarosa. AJ<sup>13</sup> 89 at the Archives nationales in Paris comprises the original libretto by Morel and Deschamps, lists and costings of sets and costumes, as well as a certain number of official letters by Morel explaining the motivation of the enterprise and applying for consent for this staged oratorio project. His main argument was that Jewish tales were just as dramatic as Greek or Roman ones (more common operatic stock), and thus the story of Saul merited a dramatic interpretation. This comparison to Greek and Roman tales served to contextualise this tale of suicide in the aesthetic debate of the time over suicide—considered a manifestation of moral flaws during the Revolutionary period—which was fuelled by turning attention to the famous Greek and Roman suicides for understanding of this human act. By inscribing his work into contemporary moral debate, Morel seems to hope to gain justification for its performance. (I am grateful to Elizabeth Bartlet for this interpretation of Morel's letter.) By qualifying the story as Jewish rather than Biblical, Morel perhaps also hoped to circumvent the argument against biblical subjects on the operatic stage and bypass 'relegation' to the realm of oratorio. Kalkbrenner and Lachnith repeated the experience in 1805 with *La Prise de Jericho*.

But composers such as Meyerbeer and Halévy were able to treat religious subjects and provide incisive psychological characterisations on religious themes precisely because they did not touch biblical figures. This did not mean that their operas escaped censorship. However, censorship concerned itself more with the form in which religious subjects were presented rather than with religious ideas themselves, and contented itself with surface details, expunging certain words and expressions from plays and libretti, and religious objects (such as altars and crucifixes) from productions.<sup>30</sup> The Opéra, however, enjoyed a certain degree of freedom in comparison to spoken theatre. The Second-Empire censor Victor Hallays-Dabot justified this laxity by saying :

At the Opéra, the pomp and artistic nature of the spectacle have always seemed to allow greater frankness. On smaller stages, these religious displays, divested of the prestige of music, these transpositions of Church matters to the theatre, before a more impressionable public, produced too great an adverse effect or hurt too many respectable sensibilities in order not to proceed with great reserve in their authorisation.<sup>31</sup>

For the official censor, realist drama, destined for what it perceived as a more impressionable—read, less affluent and lower class—audience, outlawed religious spectacle. However, the *féerique* and unwieldy dramatic machine of grand opéra removed it from this category. Old Testament characters on Parisian opera stages began to be transformed into and perceived as proto-Christian heroes, as Ralph Locke has shown with Saint-Saëns's *Samson*, especially when the plot comprised a Gentile or Philistine group to cast in the role of the 'other'.<sup>32</sup> Thus Old and New Testament stories as well as tales of early Christian saints could be brought to life on the opera stage with only minimal censorship.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, this type of portrayal had

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<sup>30</sup> Odile Krakovitch, *Hugo censuré : la liberté au théâtre au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985), 167-75. Scribe and Donizetti's opera *Les Martyrs* (1840), based on the same Corneille play as Gounod's 1878 opera *Polyeucte*, fell into this category and saw Christ disappear from its staging.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Hallays-Dabot, *La Censure dramatique et le théâtre, histoire des vingt dernières années (1850-1870)*, (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 91-2: "A l'Opéra, la pompe du spectacle et le côté artistique ont toujours paru pouvoir permettre des franchises plus grandes. Sur des scènes moins vastes, ces exhibitions religieuses, dépouillées du prestige de la musique, ces transpositions des choses de l'Église au théâtre, s'adressant à un public plus accessible aux impressions, produisaient des effets trop fâcheux ou blessaient des susceptibilités trop respectables pour qu'on n'apportât point une grande réserve dans leur autorisation."

<sup>32</sup> Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other": Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* III/3 (1991), 261-302, at 271-4. Despite its première in Weimar in 1877, Saint-Saëns's opera did not reach Parisian stages until the 1890s.

<sup>33</sup> Krakovitch (167-75) diagnoses the censors' surface nit-picking as a smokescreen to disguise their inability to get to the heart of religious thinking and to find a way to sanction ideas rather than objects. Incapable of facing the issues of the era, religious censorship gradually died to a minimum (with



become possible due to the philosophical and theological climate of the second half of the nineteenth century in France.

Positivist philosophy and modern comparative theology were concerned with palpable, historical and geographical truths, with the scientific contextualisation of Christianity during the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> For his *Vie de Jésus*, Ernest Renan explained his methodology as follows:

To my reading of the texts, I was able to add a great source of enlightenment, the sight of the places where the events took place. As the objective of the scientific mission that I led in 1860 and 1861 was the exploration of ancient Phoenicia, I came to stay on the borders of Galilee and frequently travelled there. I crossed in all directions the Gospel province; I visited Jerusalem, Hebron and Samaria; not one important location of the story of Jesus escaped me. All this history which, at a distance, seemed to float in the clouds of a world without reality thus came to life with a vitality that astonished me. The striking similarities between the texts and the places, the marvellous harmony of the Gospel ideal with the countryside that served as its backdrop was a revelation to me. I beheld a fifth Gospel, torn but still readable, and from that moment on, instead of an abstract being which one would believe never to have existed, on reading the tales of Matthew and Mark I saw an admirable human figure live and move.<sup>35</sup>

In artistic circles, opinion was divided as to the realistic representation of Oriental biblical scenes. Such portrayals were pitted against an ideal representation which supposedly preserved the essence of the spiritual and otherworldly dimension of religion. The painter Horace Vernet (1789-1863) was an influential establishment

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notable exceptions). Following new laws in 1881, granting freedom of the press, enforcement of dramatic censorship was also harder to justify. See Franck Hochleitner, 'La Censure à l'Opéra de Paris aux débuts de la III<sup>e</sup> République (1875-1914)', in Pascal Ory (ed.), *La Censure en France à l'ère démocratique (1848-...)* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1997), 233-49, at 234.

<sup>34</sup> The Jesuits provided not only a link between religion and theatre in the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth century but also an isolated but important connection in the linked realms of religion and orientalism. Jesuit missionary orders travelled to the middle and far East from the sixteenth century onwards, firmly establishing communities in Japan, China, Ceylon, the Philippines, South Vietnam and India. The Jesuits' secret to success was their integration of the Christian faith with local cults, customs and culture, the missionaries themselves often living the life of the local holy men, whether Zen priests, Confucian monks or Hindu *Sanyassi*. This disguised form of colonisation went into decline with the abolition of the Jesuit order by the Pope in 1773. See John McManners (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 314-28.

<sup>35</sup> See Ernest Renan: *Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1995), 53: "A la lecture des textes, j'ai pu joindre une grande source de lumières, la vue des lieux où se sont passés les événements. La mission scientifique ayant pour objet l'exploration de l'ancienne Phénicie, que j'ai dirigée en 1860 et 1861, m'amena à résider sur les frontières de la Galilée et à y voyager fréquemment. J'ai traversé dans tous les sens la province évangélique ; j'ai visité Jérusalem, Hébron et la Samarie ; presque aucune localité importante de l'histoire de Jésus ne m'a échappé. Toute cette histoire qui, à distance, semble flotter dans les nuages d'un monde sans réalité prit ainsi un corps, une solidité qui m'étonnèrent. L'accord frappant des textes et des lieux, la merveilleuse harmonie de l'idéal évangélique avec le paysage qui lui servit de cadre furent pour moi une révélation. J'eus devant les yeux un cinquième Évangile, lacéré, mais lisible encore, et désormais, à travers les récits de Matthieu et de Marc, au lieu d'un être abstrait, qu'on dirait n'avoir jamais existé, je vis une admirable figure humaine vivre, se mouvoir."

figure in the artistic world as both director of the Ecole normale supérieure des beaux arts, and as director of the Villa Medici in Rome at different points during his career. Vernet campaigned for a reform in biblical art and painted Old Testament subjects with Arab models.<sup>36</sup> The British artist, William Holman Hunt first journeyed to the Near East in 1854 and painted scenes from the Gospels in true scientific, positivistic spirit, convinced that to reconcile religion and modern science, biblical scenes should exactly reproduce their Oriental settings.

On the other hand, the scientific approach to art was considered an anti-artistic one by certain painters: by applying science to eternal mystic 'truths' both art and religion were belittled. Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876), the orientalist painter and writer, asserted:

To put the Bible into costume is to destroy it; like to dress a demigod is to make him man. To set the Bible in a recognisable place is to betray the spirit of it; it is making history of an ante-historical book.<sup>37</sup>

'Biblical', for Fromentin, signified mysticism of indiscriminate times gone by but not historical verism, and thus his aesthetic creed went against the theories expressed by Vernet and Holman Hunt.<sup>38</sup> For Fromentin, art should not try to copy but rather to evoke the reality; to search for exactitude was not art, was not to seek the 'truth':

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<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Warner, 'The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity and Islam', in Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984), 32-9, at 32-3. See particularly Vernet's paintings *Judah and Tamar* and *Joseph's Coat* housed in the Wallace Collection, London.

<sup>37</sup> Eugène Fromentin, *Un Été dans le Sahara: Voyage dans les oasis du Sud algérien en 1853* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1992), 61: "Costumer la Bible, c'est la détruire ; comme habiller un demi-dieu, c'est en faire un homme. La placer en un lieu reconnaissable, c'est la faire mentir à son esprit ; c'est traduire en histoire un livre antéhistorique. Comme, à toute force, il faut vêtir l'idée, les maîtres ont compris que dépouiller la forme et la simplifier, c'est-à-dire supprimer toute couleur locale, c'était se tenir aussi près que possible de la vérité."

<sup>38</sup> Fromentin, 62: "Are there not then lessons to be learnt from this people which, I acknowledge it, involuntarily and often makes one think of the Bible? Does it not possess something that stimulates the soul, that elevates and delights the spirit as in visions of times gone by? Yes, this people possess true grandeur. It is alone for, alone among the civilised, it has remained simple in its way of life, in its customs and in its movements. It is the continuous beauty of the places and seasons that surround it that make it great. It is above all great because, it achieves a near total detachment, without being naked, [...] Alone, by an admirable privilege, it conserves for the generations to come that something which we call biblical, like a perfume of ancient times." ["N'y a-t-il donc aucun enseignement à tirer de ce peuple qui, je le reconnais, fait involontairement et souvent penser à la Bible ? N'y a-t-il pas en lui quelque chose qui met l'âme en mouvement et en quoi l'esprit s'élève et se complaît comme en des visions d'un autre âge ? Oui, ce peuple possède une vraie grandeur. Il la possède seul, parce que, seul au milieu des civilisés, il est demeuré simple dans la vie, dans ses mœurs, dans ses voyages. Il est beau de la continuelle beauté des lieux et des saisons qui l'entourent. Il est beau surtout parce que, sans être nu, il arrive à ce dépouillement, [...]. Seul, par un privilège admirable, il conserve en héritage ce quelque chose qu'on appelle biblique, comme un parfum des anciens jours."]

High art does not reason, [...] it conceives, it dreams, it sees, it feels, it expresses. [...] Logic added to the *subject* leads straight to *couleur locale*, that is to say to a dead end, because having arrived there, art can but end, it is finished.<sup>39</sup>

Théophile Gautier was of a similar opinion. Of Charles Ronot's bedouin-like *Christ at the Pool of Bethesda*, Gautier affirmed: "Biblical subjects treated in such a way lose all historical colour, and those who Islamicise sacred themes are on a dangerous path."<sup>40</sup> Despite their own orientalist writings and paintings, Gautier and Fromentin believed the introduction of local or historical colour to a biblical scene closed off the realm of imagination and mysticism, of spiritual truth of the Christian faith, just as positivistic theology could be seen to be doing. But for both of these divergent groups; the Orient retained its fascination and its timeless quality that made contemporary Arab people, dress and customs relevant to the representation of biblical scenes.<sup>41</sup>

### Critical Reception

Both Massenet and his librettists used local and historical colour in their representation of the story of *Hérodiade*. Their concentration on the human relationships between the protagonists outweighed the communication of any Christian mystical message, which surfaced only rarely. The similarity of the characters of Salomé and Jean to Mary Magdalen and Christ did not go unnoticed by the critical press, and seemed to provide an explanation for the denouement of the story: Salomé, as 'belle pécheresse', seduces the holy Jean. Indeed, at the outset of the opera, Salomé lays herself at Jean's feet and offers him her all.

Salomé loves Jean with the same mystic and sensual fervor as that with which Mary Magdalene loves Jesus. Jean's character possesses the same greatness, the same divine serenity as Jesus; like him, he graciously welcomes the woman who is in love with him, whilst trying to convert this earthly love to a sublime and heavenly fervour.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Eugène Fromentin, *Une année dans le Sahel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 179: "Le très grand art ne raisonne pas, [...] il conçoit, il rêve, il voit, il sent, il exprime. [...] La logique apportée dans le *sujet* conduit tout droit à la couleur locale, c'est-à-dire à une impasse, car, arrivé là, l'art n'a plus qu'à s'arrêter ; il est fini."

<sup>40</sup> See Théophile Gautier, *Les Beaux Arts en Europe*, (1855), II, 19, cited by Warner (34), and also Jean Alazard, *L'Orient et la peinture française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle : d'Eugène Delacroix à Auguste Renoir* (Paris: Plon, 1930), 132.

<sup>41</sup> See also Locke, 264-5.

<sup>42</sup> Victorin Joncières, *La Liberté*, 26 December 1881: "Salomé aime Jean avec le même ferveur mystique et sensuelle que Marie-Magdeleine aime Jésus. Le personnage de Jean a la même grandeur, la même sérénité divine que Jésus; comme lui, il accueille avec bonté la femme qui lui a donné son cœur, en cherchant à transformer cet amour terrestre en un sublime élan vers le ciel."

In keeping with the orientalist colouring of the work, Salomé was thus cast in Joncières's review as a temptress, as the sexually enticing and available woman who was a central topoi of artistic orientalism. Camille Saint-Saëns referred to her as "an enigmatic and fascinating 'fleur du mal'",<sup>43</sup> and Arthur Pougin described 'the prophet-eater' Salomé as "a sort of Israelite grisette, who hounds Saint John the Baptist with her amorous obsessions".<sup>44</sup> Such descriptions of Salomé failed to acknowledge, however, the psychological development of her character through the course of the opera, from willing courtesan to voluntary martyr (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

Yet not all the critics laid the blame for Jean's transgressions entirely at Salomé's door. In contrast to Joncières, Ernest Reyer was one of these few critics who discerned from the very start of the opera that Jean was not quite as innocent as the biblical character:

Salomé [is] in love with Jean and Jean [is] not far from being in love with Salomé. If, in the first duet he sings with the daughter of Hérodiade, Jean says to her: "Love me as if in a dream..... Transfigure the love that consumes your senses", in the second, his mystic dream becomes muddled and he ends up exclaiming, with an enthusiasm that is self-explanatory: Yes, that I may breathe the heady fragrance of this flower, Press it to my lips and whisper: I love you!... O rapture of love, embrace us forever!...<sup>45</sup>

Whilst granting Jean the benefit of the doubt over his Act I behaviour, Reyer readily points out the libretto's wilful confusion of spiritual and physical love in Jean's rapport with Salomé. Bénédict Jouvin affirmed that the opera's Jean:

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<sup>43</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, 'Hérodiade', *Le Voltaire*, 22 December 1881: "A moi, Regnault! à moi, Flaubert! à moi vous tous qui vous êtes épris de ce type étrange de puberté lascive et d'inconsciente cruauté qui a nom Salomé, fleur du mal éclore dans l'ombre du temple, énigmatique et fascinatrice! Venez et expliquez-moi, vous, les génies, expliquez-moi comment Salomé s'est changée en Marie-Magdeleine! ou plutôt ne m'expliquez rien, je ne chercherai pas à comprendre, et je ne m'occuperai pas des étrangetés d'un poème qui échappe à ma faible raison."

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Pougin, Massenet', *Rivista musicale Italiana*, XIX, 1912, 31. Pougin describes Salomé as "une sorte de grisette israélite, qui poursuit saint Jean-Baptiste de ses obsessions amoureuses", and Jean as the "prophète illuminé" who is portrayed as "une espèce de niais qui finit par répondre aux agaceries de cette péronnelle et par en devenir absolument fêru." Pougin puts the onus of Jean's fall onto Salomé whilst conceding that the opera portrayed the saint as "a sort of simpleton who ends up responding to the coquetteries of this silly goose, becoming completely besotted."

<sup>45</sup> Ernest Reyer, 'Revue Musicale', *Journal des Débats*, 25 December 1881: "Salomé [est] amoureuse de Jean et Jean [est] bien près d'être amoureux de Salomé. Si, dans le premier duo qu'il chante avec la fille d'Hérodiade Jean lui dit : « Aime-moi comme on aime en songe..... Transfigure l'amour qui consume tes sens », dans le second, il a beau s'embrouiller en son rêve mystique, il ne fini pas moins par s'écrier, dans un transport que la situation explique suffisamment du reste : Oui, je puis respirer cette enivrante fleur, La presser sur ma bouche et murmurer : je t'aime!... O transport de l'amour, embrase-nous toujours!..."

has ceased to be the goat-skin-clothed precursor, [and] he has become, in the mind of the young maestro, a symbol of Humanity, sensitive, of strong and simple soul and of the modern world.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, it was Jean's modernity and humanity that made inevitable the opera's final scenario:

the victim, at the denouement of this decapitation is neither apostle, nor prophet, nor precursor: it is Jean, Salomé's lover, the preferred rival to Hérode for her affections.<sup>47</sup>

That John the Baptist could be portrayed as less than a chaste prophet caused dissent and disappointment among certain critics. Joncières believed that the twist in the story diminished the character of Jean and reduced his final dramatic scene with Salomé to the rank of a banal love duet:

In spite of everything, we are shocked to see the inspired prophet's strength of soul that has, up till now, managed to resist the seduction of the blonde Salomé, fail at the supreme hour. It is a real shame when Jean, the Lord's chosen one – Christ to us – takes on the ordinary allure of an opera lover, as Salomé enters his prison, and sings, his weight forward, his hands clasped, "No, love is not blasphemy."<sup>48</sup>

Savigny, on the other hand, was more concerned with the global issue of the perversion of the martyr's character, seeing the opera's Jean as a ridiculous figure, oblivious to the behaviour demanded of his prophetic status, as in the final act:

The prophet is thrown in prison: the martyr's final hour approaches without his soul being troubled by it; his soul even leaves the earth in a celestial flight when Salomé, entering the dungeon, comes to die with him. Jean can allow himself this moment of love without committing earthly offence for he will soon belong to heaven. However much I try, I cannot accept such concessions; if it is necessary to bring such subjects to the stage, at least let it be the lesser martyrs, but leave Zachariah's son on the banks of the Jordan. John in his desert, and Christ on his cross. Our era has found love in the Gospels; it is not a discovery of which it should be proud.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bénédict Jouvin, 'l'Hérodiade de Jules Massenet', *Le Figaro*, 22 December 1881: "a cessé d'être le Précurseur vêtu de poil de chèvre, il est devenu, dans la pensée du jeune maître, la grande figure de l'Humanité, sensible, âme forte et simple du monde nouveau."

<sup>47</sup> Bénédict Jouvin, 'Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie: Par dépêché: Première représentation d'Hérodiade', *Le Figaro*, 20 December 1881: "la victime, au dénouement, de cette décollation, n'est ni apôtre, ni prophète, ni précurseur: c'est Jean, l'amant de Salomé et le rival préféré par elle à Hérode."

<sup>48</sup> Joncières: "On est choqué malgré tout de voir faiblir à l'heure suprême la force d'âme du prophète inspiré, qui a su résister jusque-là aux séductions de la blonde Salomé. C'est bien pis lorsque, celle-ci pénétrant dans sa prison, Jean, l'élu du Seigneur – le Christ pour nous – prend l'attitude banal d'un amoureux d'opéra, et chant, le corps penché en avant, les mains jointes : « Non, l'amour n'est pas un blasphème.»"

<sup>49</sup> M. Savigny, 'Théâtre-Italien : *Hérodiade*, opéra en quatre actes, de MM. Paul Milliet et Henri Grémont, musique de M. Jules Massenet', *Les Théâtres*, n.d. B.n.F. Opéra, Dossier d'œuvre, *Hérodiade*: "Le prophète est jeté en prison : l'heure du martyre approche sans que son âme en soit troublée; elle quitte même la terre dans un essor céleste, lorsque Salomé pénétrant dans le cachot, vient mourir avec lui. Cette heure d'amour, Jean peut la donner sans crime à la terre, bientôt il appartiendra au ciel. Quelque effort que je fasse sur moi-même, je ne puis arriver à de telles concessions; s'il est nécessaire d'attaquer de tels sujets à la scène, qu'on prenne au moins le commun des martyrs, mais qu'on laisse le fils de Zacharie sur le bord du Jourdain. Jean à son désert, le Christ à son croix. Notre époque a trouvé l'amour dans l'évangile; ce n'est pas une découverte dont elle doive

Théophile Gautier had expressed his concern over the 'Islamicisation' of religion as posing a 'threat' to Christian mysticism. However, 'orientalisation' of biblical stories revealed an even greater danger, for the Orient often served as a screen for the projection of the West's repressed sexual desires. Thus the 'orientalisation' of biblical subjects might also lead to their 'eroticisation'. When combined with the trend for mystical forms of Catholic devotion which developed alongside the orientalist movement in the arts, French society at large could be seen to interpret the Christian religion as an exotically sensual experience, resulting also in a fashion for music of a sacred character which liberally combined mysticism and sensuality. The rather puritanical tone taken by Savigny betrays his discomfort with what had thus become a preoccupation of modern society. At the same time, however, critics such as Joncières and Savigny were unwilling to recognise the image of a weak and corrupt religious man in the opera's portrayal of Jean. Whilst they may have been able to appreciate the anticlerical portrayal of nineteenth-century priests in the works of Jules Michelet or Father Chiniquy, they were unwilling and unable to transfer this portrait, in the context of a biblical opera, onto John the Baptist himself.

It was not surprising, therefore, that following performances of *Hérodiade* in Lyon in December 1885, the Catholic newspaper *L'Univers*, did not hesitate to condemn the opera's libretto as a travesty and sacrilegious,<sup>50</sup> and that the word 'excommunication' was bandied in the press with regard to Massenet and his librettists. Controversy was fuelled by an open letter from the Archbishop of Lyon, Cardinal Caverot, published in the *Lyonnais Revue hebdomadaire*:

If certain [Catholics] were tempted to give in to the influence of the somewhat attractive proprieties, they should take care to remind themselves that there are cases when the logic and honour of our faith imposes rigorous sacrifices. A wine goblet may well be golden, but knowing it poisoned, it is kept away from the lips at all costs; similarly, it is in vain that art parades its seduction: if it is destined to aid impiety, the Christian duty is to remain obstinately unfamiliar with it.<sup>51</sup>

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être fière." Whilst possessing no date, this article most likely dates from the Parisian première, due to its referral to the opera as one in four acts.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Emile Cère, 'L'Excommunication de Massenet', *La France*, 5 January 1886.

<sup>51</sup> See Cère: "Si quelques-uns [Catholiques] étaient tentés de céder à l'influence de formes plus ou moins attrayantes, ils voudront bien se rappeler qu'il y a bien des cas où la logique et l'honneur de notre foi nous imposent de rigoureux sacrifices. Une coupe a beau être d'or, si on la sait empoisonnée, on l'écarte de ses lèvres à tout prix; de même, c'est en vain que l'art ferait étalage de ses séductions: s'il est destiné à venir en aide à l'impiété, le devoir du chrétien est d'y demeurer obstinément étranger."

Inciting good Christians to resist the seduction of an openly sensual and corrupt art, the Cardinal's own language is surprisingly hedonistic.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Cardinal Caverot uses the image of a 'poisoned golden goblet', much like the one which Hérode eagerly drains of a love potion in Act II of the opera which he hopes will induce the impression that he carnally possesses Salomé. Like Jean in the opera, who often gives a sensual and ambiguous description of Christian duty, so the Cardinal Caverot seemed to do likewise, and the link between the Catholic religion and eroticism, highlighted by anticlerical republicans and even more sombre Catholics, appears to be reinforced by the Church itself which leaves its congregation with a recommendation that is not so easy to follow.

The Archbishop's communiqué was cannon fodder for anticlerical critics such as Emile Cère:

Should one laugh at this artistic profession of faith and at this excommunication demanded over *Hérodiade*, or should one consider that modern society cannot reconcile itself with the clergy, that vigilant guardian of fanaticism? Should one scoff at this Cardinal's bad humour, frightened by an innocent little opera, or should one call on those people who still believe in the liberalism of the clergy and the possibilities (of a reconciliation) between it and the French population? [...] Today, a dramatic author forgets to make John the Baptist a miracle-working saint and the senior clergy scream profanation and sacrilege. Fanaticism is making progress.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, more strictly artistic criticism tended to play down the scandal.

Henri Heugel wrote:

No doubt, it is rather unorthodox that Saint John the Baptist be given the airs and graces of a salesman of contemporary fashions, but one must take our decadent era into consideration. [...] Without wasting the time to cast his scores in bronze, he [Massenet], above all, closely follows the whims of fashion, and there is no music as fashionable as his. No-one has better understood the mystical touch and the titillating aspect that could be obtained [from fashion] by skillfully introducing it into the stage's arousing love scenes: a marriage of heaven and earth. To these lengths, he knew how to dress the Virgin Mary with a grisette's bonnet and created a Christ who would not shame the salons of the nicer suburbs. Is it not just that? And does not this process demand considerable flair and skill?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Massenet is reported to have said that the clergy did not find 'religious' the same music as musicians, equating religious music with precious objects belonging to the Church and i.e. part of the clergy's penchant for theatre and luxury. See Charles Koechlin, 'Souvenirs de la classe Massenet (1894-1895)', *Le Ménestrel*, 5158, 8 March 1935, 81-2, at 82.

<sup>53</sup> Cère: "Faut-il rire de cette profession de foi artistique et de cette excommunication lancée contre *Hérodiade*, ou faut-il considérer que la société moderne ne peut se reconcilier avec le clergé, gardien vigilant du fanatisme? Faut-il railler la mauvaise humeur de ce cardinal, auquel fait peur un opéra bien innocent, ou faut-il faire appel à ceux qui croient encore au libéralisme du clergé et à la possibilité entre lui et la population française? [...] Aujourd'hui, un auteur dramatique oublie de faire de Jean-Baptiste un saint répandant les miracles, et le haut clergé crie à la profanation et au sacrilège. Le fanatisme est en progrès."

<sup>54</sup> Moreno (alias Henri Heugel), 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel*, 52/6, Sunday 10 January 1886, 42-3, at 43: "Sans doute il est peu orthodoxe de prêter à saint Jean-Baptiste les grâces d'un commis de

And yet at the same time, Heugel's poisonous review clearly reflects the four-year gap between the première of the opera and the period when he was writing. By the start of 1886, decadence had become an issue of artistic and social debate, and was often bound up with women's developing status within society. Heugel's review, therefore, makes an explicit link between the feminisation and, by extension, the decadence of Catholicism, Massenet and of the opera's scenario. Heugel associates Jean Baptiste, Massenet and the Church with what was considered the ephemeral, irrational, sentimental and female preoccupation with fashion and fashions, thereby implying their collective shallowness, and shackles them to the traditionally female sphere of artistic activity and influence, the society salon. In this way, Heugel's review ironically brands the opera, Catholicism and the composer as decadent, all the while recognising and congratulating Massenet on the success that such an opera was likely to find among those people resembling its author, the contemporary 'decadent' opera audiences.

The comparison between Jean and Jesus, explicitly made by many critics, was all the more problematic because Jean's fall implied that of the Messiah. Johannes Weber also commented on Jean's similarity to Jesus but highlighted his inferiority in relation to his cousin:

M. Massenet's Jean is but a diminutive of Christ, except that he does not perform miracles and instead of dying on the cross, he is decapitated. Even if he were not in love, he would be worth no better.<sup>55</sup>

Weber's perspicacious review highlighted the fact that even if Jean had not fallen for Salomé, he would still have been a mere shadow of the religious man that Jesus was. In particular, Act II, scene 7, during which Jean makes a grand processional entrance

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nouveautés; mais il y faut faire la part de l'époque décadente que nous traversons. [...] Sans perdre son temps à couler ses partitions dans le bronze, il [Massenet] s'attache surtout à suivre les caprices de la mode, et il n'y a pas de pages de musique qui soient plus dans le mouvement que les siennes.

Personne n'a mieux compris surtout la note mystique et le parti piquant qu'on pouvait en tirer en l'introduisant habilement parmi les troublantes amours de la scène : le mariage du ciel avec la terre. Il a su à propos coiffer la Vierge d'un bonnet de grisette, et dessiner un Christ qui ne déparerait pas les salons du noble faubourg. N'est-ce donc rien que cela? Et le procédé n'exige-t-il pas beaucoup de flair et d'adresse?" Moreno makes reference to two of Massenet's oratorios: *La Vierge* (premiered in 1880) and *Marie-Magdeleine*. As Massenet was often criticised for pandering to fashion and tastes, this article can also be read as criticism and jealousy on Moreno's behalf: it was not until 1891 that Heugel acquired Georges Hartmann's business and the rights to publish Massenet's highly popular successes.

<sup>55</sup> Johannes Weber, 'Critique Musicale: Feuilleton du Temps', *Le Temps*, 4 January 1882: "Le Jean de M. Massenet [...] n'est qu'un diminutif du Christ, à cela près qu'il ne fait pas de miracle et qu'au lieu



surrounded by Canaanite women followers waving palm branches and haloed by the moonlight was compared to Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.<sup>56</sup> According to Perkéo, *Le Figaro's* Brussels correspondent, the opera's authors had "set their sights on a different story, a different judgement, another martyr". The role of Jean replaced a character "that decency prohibited from bringing to the stage", and this Passion story was one "adapted to the requirements of the theatre whose conventions demand that love plays its part, a preponderant role."<sup>57</sup>

With regard to the ideas and feelings expressed by Jean, and their musical translation, the critics were, however, divided. Perkéo congratulated Massenet on his musical treatment of noble, humanist sentiments :

In his music, M. Massenet felt inspired "to the marrow" by the mystical, philosophical and idealistic side of the subject. His music speaks the language that is useful for expressing these lofty thoughts of devotion, liberty and emancipation, which are the basis of this Christian drama to which the moral conditions of the era in which the action takes place lend a sort of wild mysticism.<sup>58</sup>

For Perkéo, Massenet's music mirrored perfectly the apparently dominant spiritual and moral aspects of the libretto. The republican Weber, on the other hand, took pleasure in exposing the hypocrisy of the musical characterisation of biblical subjects, taking a very different view of Massenet's characterisation of Christ's precursor:

To the same melodic phrases used as Jean speaks of the infinite, his clay prison, the justice for which he is going to die, he could just as well speak of his love for Salomé. [...] When Jean, feeling overcome by a sentiment too tender, asks God "Tell me why

de mourir sur la croix, il est décapité. Quand même il ne serait pas amoureux, il n'en vaudrait pas beaucoup mieux."

<sup>56</sup> The stage directions indicate a lighting effect: "Les blanches clartés de la lune les enveloppent comme dans une auréole." ["The white moonbeams envelop them as if in a halo."] Johannes Weber in *Le Temps* remarked that all that was missing from this scene was Jesus's donkey.

<sup>57</sup> Perkéo, 'Lettre de Bruxelles', *Le Figaro*, Wednesday 7 December 1881: "on voit que les auteurs visent un autre drame, un autre procès, un autre martyre et que la figure du prophète Jean en remplace une autre que le respect défendait de mettre en scène. Evidemment, ce drame d'Hérodiade, c'est le drame de la Passion, mais la Passion accommodée aux exigences de la scène théâtrale où les conventions exigent que l'amour joue son rôle, et un rôle prépondérant." Charles Koechlin (82) reports that Massenet, in his composition class at the Conservatoire, affirmed that "Saint John the Baptist, in my mind, is not the *Precursor* of history, but Christ himself [...] and Salomé is Mary Magdalene. The entry of Jean into Jerusalem, is that of Jesus. Everything is modelled on the life of Christ." ["Saint Jean-Baptiste, dans mon idée, ce n'est pas le *Précurseur* de l'Histoire, c'est le Christ lui-même [...] et Salomé c'est Marie-Magdeleine. L'entrée de Jean à Jérusalem, c'est celle de Jésus. Partout c'est calqué sur la vie de Christ."]

<sup>58</sup> Perkéo: "M. Massenet, dans sa musique, s'est senti inspiré « jusqu'aux moelles » par le côté mystique, philosophique et idéal du sujet. Sa musique parle bien la langue qui sert à exprimer ces grandes pensées de dévouement, de liberté, d'émancipation qui sont le fond de ce drame chrétien, auquel les conditions morales de l'époque où se passe l'action donnent une sorte de mysticisme farouche."

you suffer love to come and shake my faith?" he could just as well sing the following words: "I shall see you, you whom I adore, you, my entire happiness!" I even claim that these words are better suited to the music than those of M. Milliet;<sup>59</sup>

In his review, therefore, Weber succeeds in pinpointing the dangers of trying to make opera express mystico-religious sentiments in tandem with what Perkéo recognised as the obligatory and preponderant love element. In doing so, Weber derisively demonstrates the interchangeability of secular and sacred texts in respect of Massenet's music.

### Religion, Exoticism and Eroticism

As we have seen, orientalism, positivism and theology had placed Jesus and his entourage firmly in their middle-eastern setting, and the eroticism of the exotic became associated with both the Christian and Judaic religions. Orientalist eroticism was used in the words and music assigned to the first Christian martyr in *Hérodiade*, as well as for the music of the 'orientals', the Jews with their religious ceremonies charged with exotic and voluptuous mystico-eroticism.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the mystical invariably implies the erotic in Massenet's music, be it Christian, Jewish, pagan, supernatural, or any other religious mysticism, and they are frequently interchangeable, a point highlighted by Weber's flippant rewriting of Jean Baptiste's supplication of God from his prison, cited earlier.

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<sup>59</sup> Weber: "sur les mêmes phrases mélodiques sur lesquelles Jean parle de l'infini, de sa prison d'argile, de la justice pour laquelle il va mourir, il pourrait tout aussi bien parler de son amour pour Salomé. [...] Lorsque Jean se sentant envahi par un sentiment trop tendre, demande à Dieu : « Dis-moi pourquoi tu souffres que l'amour vienne ébranler ma foi? » il pourrait tout aussi bien chanter les paroles suivantes : « Je vais te voir, toi que j'adore, toi qui fait tout mon bonheur! » Je prétends même que ces paroles conviennent mieux à la musique que celles de M. Milliet;"

<sup>60</sup> It was not only the music of the nineteenth-century Christian tradition which was influenced by the inclusion of 'oriental' exoticisms, but also, in the Temple scene, the music of the ancient Jewish religion which was inscribed with the standards of the Western art tradition. (Indeed, the process is reciprocal in *Hérodiade*, for all the opera's religious musics, whether Jewish or Christian, reflect the late-nineteenth-century French fashion for sensual devotional music.) Very few critics made much reference to the authentic Hebrew chant included in the Act III Temple scene, whilst numerous journalists expressed their admiration for the "Marche sainte" that also forms part of this scene. Massenet's 'ethnomusicological' use of Hebrew chant (Weber recounts Massenet's visit to a local synagogue in order to be able to recreate authentic Jewish chant), followed by a full-chorus, *a cappella*, intoned repeat of the Hebrew text accompanied by the ringing of devotional bells, is more or less eclipsed in the critique. However, the preceding diatonic, full-orchestra, hymn-like and hence Westernised march for the assembly's entrance into the Temple, marked *Andante Religioso*, is the one moment in the opera that enjoys unanimous praise. The juxtaposition of these two contrasting passages, that are, in fact, designed for the same purpose, no doubt helped to reinforce the aural memory of the Holy March's Western beauty on the ear of the assembled French critics.

In relation to the music of *Hérodiade*, *Esclarmonde* and *Thaïs*, Annegret Fauser has noted the subtle blend of religion and eroticism. The distance created between the stage action and nineteenth-century audiences by the exotic, historical settings common to all three operas seems to have permitted the inclusion of more intense erotic musical spectacle than was possible in Massenet's operas which were set in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Western Europe, such as *Manon*, *Werther* or *Sapho*, despite the religious connections of the scenarios.<sup>61</sup> This tendency for the religious erotic in both operatic and liturgical music developed rapidly during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, as the development in Massenet's own music testifies—from *Marie-Magdeleine* to *Thaïs*—alongside that of his contemporaries. For example, in the dramatic oratorios of Gounod written during the 1880s, Saint-Saëns discerned the “scent of the Church, well known to Catholics”, mingled with an “*odor di femina*”, culminating in a heady mix of the religious and the mystic, the spiritual and the sensual, the Godly and the pagan.<sup>62</sup> Neither the opera house, nor the Church had the monopoly on the religious erotic, and both were quite happy to blur the boundaries between the sensual and the mystical, to liberally exploit a contemporary fashion.

In *Hérodiade*, a striking example of Massenet's versatile musical language to evoke the religious and/or the erotic can be seen between the two versions of the score (that of the première and the definitive version, see Appendix 1) where two elements are reused in ‘opposing’ contexts. In the definitive version of the opera, Act II opens with a new tableau for Hérode who is obsessed by his desire for Salomé, the court dancer. Much of its material was drawn from elsewhere in the work, including the Babylonian dance, based on a theme associated with Salomé, and a relatively free-metred song for a Babylonian slave girl in which she proffers a love potion to Hérode, accompanied by strummed harp chords with woodwind interjections. Both these elements are drawn from the Temple scene immediately before Jean's trial in the original version of the score. [See Figure 1.] This scene depicts the Jews as they excitedly but reverently retake possession of the Temple and the solemn ceremony for the reinstatement of the High Priest at the altar, followed by thanksgiving.

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<sup>61</sup> Fauser, ‘Le rôle de l'élément érotique dans l'œuvre de Massenet’, *Massenet en son temps*. Actes du colloque organisé en 1992 à l'occasion du deuxième Festival Massenet (Saint-Etienne: Association du Festival Massenet/L'Esplanade Saint-Etienne Opéra, 1999), 156-79, at 172.

<i>1881 Première score</i>	<i>Definitive score</i>
	<b>Act II, scene 5: La Chambre d'Hérode</b> Includes: - 'Danse babylonienne', formerly 'Les filles de Manahim'. - Chant by 'jeune babylonienne', formerly 'Le Chant de la Sulamite'.
<b>Act II, scene 8: Le Temple</b> Comprises: - Marche sainte - Scène religieuse - Danses sacrées: 1. 'Les filles de Manahim', followed by 'Le Chant de la Sulamite'. 2. Dance ( $^9_8$ , B minor).	<b>Act III, scene 2: Le Temple</b> Comprises: - Marche sainte - Scène religieuse - Danse sacrée: Retains (varied) 3-bar harp introduction to 'les Filles de Manahim', then cuts to Dance ( $^9_8$ , B minor).

Figure 1.

This celebratory ceremony comprised a dance by devout Israelite girls which easily became that of a pagan and erotically alluring Babylonian girl in the definitive version of the score. [Examples 1a & b.] Indeed, the ambiguity of the dance's musical material is exaggerated by its use of a motive generally associated with Salomé herself who is simultaneously both an erotically potent dancer and devout follower of the nascent Christian cult. To discern Massenet's intention for the "Chant de la Sulamite" melody is equally problematic. [Examples 2a & b.] In the 1880/81 autograph full score the "Chant de la Sulamite" appears with the text of the charming Babylonian slave girl crossed through and replaced with a devotional text (albeit a sensual one),<sup>63</sup> all in Massenet's hand.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Ecole Buissonnière. Notes et Souvenirs* (Paris: Pierre Lafitte, 1913), 205.

<sup>63</sup> Weber, the one critic who noted the chant's use 'to great effect', also noted that the text of the "Chant de la Sulamite" echoed passages from the "Song of Songs". Thus the libretto infused the exotic with the erotic which, as Weber notes, is in direct contrast to Massenet's 'authentic' use of Hebrew chant for the Scène religieuse, for both woman's and eroticism's participation in the Israelite Temple were non-existent.

<sup>64</sup> BnF Opéra, Rés. A. 736 a (II), ff. 330-4.

DANSES SACRÉES  
LES FILLES DE MANAHÏM

J. 126  
Allegro

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with several slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is placed below the first measure of the upper staff.

The second system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff continues the melodic line with slurs. The lower staff continues the bass line. The system concludes with a double bar line.

All<sup>o</sup>. Mod<sup>o</sup>. J. 120

The third system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff begins with a melodic phrase and then contains several measures of chords. The lower staff contains a bass line with some rests. Dynamic markings of *f* and *p* are used throughout the system.

The fourth system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff features a series of chords with dynamic markings of *f* and *p*. The lower staff contains a bass line with some rests. The system concludes with a double bar line.

13

stille

The fifth system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a series of chords, with a dynamic marking of *stille* (piano) above the first measure. The lower staff contains a bass line. The system concludes with a double bar line.

### DANSE BABYLONIENNE

All.<sup>o</sup> brillante vivo  $\text{♩} = 144$

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a piano (p) and violin (v) part. The first system (measures 1-4) features a piano introduction with a forte (**f**) dynamic. The second system (measures 5-8) includes a violin entry marked *(v)* and a piano section marked **ff**. The third system (measures 9-12) is marked *très marqué* and includes a tempo change to *All.<sup>o</sup> Mod.<sup>o</sup>  $\text{♩} = 120$* . The fourth system (measures 13-16) continues with dynamic markings of *p* and *f*, and includes the instruction *smile* above the piano part.

CHANT DE LA SULAMITE

Andantino lento ♩ = 80

Une jeune ISRAËLITE

8 Soprani

FEMMES DE JÉRUSALEM

Andantino lento

*mf*

UNE JEUNE ISRAËLITE

*p*

Com - me la ro - se nou - vel - le

mon bien ai - mé res - pien - dit!

*dim.*

*f* *dim.*

Viens!

*sost.*

*f*

*rit.*

*c.*

$\text{♩} = 100$   
All<sup>o</sup> moderato. UNE JEUNE BABYLONIENNE (à Hérode)

Que ce philtre a-mou-reux dis-si-pe ton en-nui... *mf* Esclaves  
Que ce philtre a-mou-

All<sup>o</sup> moderato.  
*f* *dim.* *mf* *f* *mf*

reux dis-si-pe ton en-nui...

*poco rall.*  
*dim.*

Andantino lento *mf*  
Andantino lento  $\text{♩} = 80$  Mal-tre, bes dans cette am-pho-re

*p* *simile.*

Le vin ro-sé d'En-gad-dil... *dim.*

Bast *ost.*

*silves.* *f* *ost.*



However, two different colours of ink are used in the autograph of *Hérodiade*: the original orchestration of 1880 appears in purple ink and rewrites from 1881 and 1882 in black ink. The secular text appears in purple ink, Massenet replacing it in black ink with the devotional one. The apparent anteriority of the secular intention of this music is confirmed by the dates that figure on the autograph pages.<sup>65</sup> Thus both the “Chant de la Sulamite” and the first “danse sacrée” of the autograph full score may be identified as originally being secular and erotic in nature, yet transposing without the slightest difficulty into a sacred context, and then back again into the secular in the definitive version of the score. Massenet’s religious musical language is so highly sensuous that it can be inserted into Hérode’s slave-filled chamber without incongruity and vice versa.

Savigny implicitly linked the Christian and the erotic in Massenet’s *œuvre* by suggesting that in order to create strong and powerful works such as this biblical opera, Massenet needed “these warm temperatures of passion”.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Joncières described the sacred dances as “voluptuously chaste [...]. It is oriental sensuality transformed into religious feeling.”<sup>67</sup> This sort of rhetoric may seem incongruous to the modern reader, but in late-nineteenth-century France, religious devotion and religious music were often characterised by such sentiments: the sensuality and sentimentality of liturgical music reflected the development of ritualised styles of worship associated with the so-called feminisation of Catholicism. Within this

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<sup>65</sup> These elements form part of Act II in the original version of the score but their dates of orchestration correspond to those of the first act. Act I was first orchestrated between January and May 1880, Act II over the summer vacation (July and August 1880). The orchestration of the “Danse sacrée” and the “Chant de la Sulamite” date from March 1880. The rest of the scene (i.e. the “Marche sainte”, the “Scène religieuse” and a second sacred dance) is dated to May 1881. This entire scene, therefore, forms part of the extensive reworkings carried out by Massenet in May and June 1881.

<sup>66</sup> Savigny: “ces températures chaleureuses de la passion.”

<sup>67</sup> Joncières: “voluptueusement chaste [...]. C’est le sensualisme oriental transformé en sentiment religieux.” A similar but more ironic and disdainful tone was taken by Heugel when reviewing the 1884 Parisian première of *Hérodiade*, which followed two years after the première of *Manon*. Like Joncières, Heugel affirmed that Massenet’s melodies remained chaste in their sensuality, and then developed this apparent dichotomy of language by adding: “M. Massenet’s slightly morbid and wimply muse excels at describing these mystic ardours, these sacristy passions, these burning dreams of the seminarist, where human weaknesses are sanctified by a little holy water, where the incense and the smell of perfumed candles makes the brain hallucinate and plunges it into sweet ecstasy.” As in his 1886 review, Heugel’s criticism links Massenet and his music to Catholicism and its perceived feminisation due to popular and ritualised forms of devotion. [Moreno (alias Henri Heugel), ‘Semaine théâtrale’, *Le Ménestrel*, 50/11, 10 February 1884, 83–4, at 83: “La muse un peu malade et embéguinée de M. Massenet excelle à décrire ces ardeurs mystiques, ces passions de sacristie, ces rêves brûlants de séminariste, où les faiblesses humaines sont sanctifiées d’un peu d’eau bénite, où

Catholic aesthetic, it is hardly surprising to find similar rhetoric in *Hérodiade* and, more specifically, in the mouth of Jean Baptiste.

### Jean Baptiste and Salomé

But his voice became calm, harmonious, lilting. He foresaw an emancipation, the splendours of heaven, the newly-born baby with one foot in the dragon's cave, gold replacing clay, the desert blooming like a rose : – “That which is now worth sixty kiccars will not cost an obole. Fountains of milk will gush over the rocks; you will fall asleep well fed in the press-houses! When are you coming, you in whom I put my hope? Already, all nations kneel before you, and your rule will be eternal, Son of David! “ [...] “There is no other king but the Eternal!”<sup>68</sup>

The Jean whom Salomé knows is completely drawn from this paragraph by Flaubert. In her Act I aria, Salomé, fuelled with adolescent enthusiasm, describes Jean: “He is calm, he is good, his words are serene, [...] I was suffering, and my heart was soothed on hearing his melodious, tender voice!”<sup>69</sup> Salomé's description of the beloved prophet is sung over dominant bass pedals accompanying dominant-seventh harmonies; Massenet's use of dominant pedals and the tonic chord in its second inversion that postpones and withholds the grounding effect of root position resolution adds a sense of expectancy to an aria about a Jean whom the audience has not yet encountered. Similarly, when the soothsayer Phaniel interrogates the heavens as to Jean's identity in Act III, the musical underpinning prolongs the tonic chord in second inversion in a traditional Ic, V, I cadential procedure. The use of sustained cadential second inversion chords which are left unresolved imbues the music with a pervasive sense of frustrated expectancy, and thus Massenet evokes the ambiguous

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l'encens et l'odeur des cierges parfumés hallucinent le cerveau et le plongent dans les douces extases.”]

<sup>68</sup> Gustave Flaubert, ‘Hérodiade’, *Trois Contes* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1983), 123-4: “Mais la voix se fit douce, harmonieuse, chantante. Il annonçait un affranchissement, des splendeurs au ciel, le nouveau-né un bras dans la caverne du dragon, l'or à la place de l'argile, le désert s'épanouissant comme une rose : – «Ce qui maintenant vaut soixante kiccars ne coûtera pas une obole. Des fontaines de lait jailliront des rochers; on s'endormira dans les pressoirs le ventre plein! Quand viendras-tu, toi que j'espère? D'avance, tous les peuples s'agenouillent, et ta domination sera éternelle, Fils de David! » [...] « Il n'y a pas d'autre roi que l'Eternel! »”

<sup>69</sup> Salomé: “Il est doux, il est bon, sa parole est sereine, [...] je souffrais, j'étais seule, et mon cœur s'est calmé en écoutant sa voix mélodieuse et tendre!” Salomé goes on to apply the prophet's question about the coming of the Messiah to her next meeting with Jean himself: Flaubert's Iaokanann's “When are you coming, you in whom I put my hope?” becomes the operatic Salomé's “Oh! when will he return? When shall I be able to hear his voice?” [“Ah! quand reviendra-t-il? Quand pourrai-je l'entendre?”]

and unresolved nature of Jean's identity and destiny and his relationship with Salomé.<sup>70</sup>

Salomé's portrayal of Jean is far from the rough, roaring man that Hérodiade knows. In the third and fourth scenes of Act I, the different facets of his character are effectively juxtaposed as an antagonistic encounter between Jean and the Antipas couple is followed by a duet with Salomé. As Jean shrugs off his anger, Salomé appears and passionately throws herself at his feet. Salomé proceeds to declare her love for him, even identifying Jean as her *patrie*. Indeed, without a known parentage or stable family life, Salomé's sadness finds consolation in the wider patriarchal family of Jean's 'Church'. Salomé has no republican mother to teach her the value of her *patrie*, as much by traditional and virtuous example as by any other means; she has only Jean, who replaces her missing mother and provides her with a homeland. Whilst open to Salomé's feelings for him, Jean with a heavy heart stresses that it is the season of love for Salomé only; he has a different destiny to fulfil. Significantly, Jean's rejection of Salomé turns into preaching at the point where she offers him that which Hérode fantasises about: her hair. At Salomé's words "At your feet let the gold of my hair be spread! Yes it is you alone that I love! Oh Jean!"<sup>71</sup> (Hérode dreams "Let my lips lightly brush over your golden hair!"),<sup>72</sup> Jean attempts to lift her thoughts to higher sentiments. Salomé's hair, indeed, does seem to be the key to something. In ancient Jewish civilisation, a woman's hair possessed a strong erotic attraction.<sup>73</sup> In St. Luke's gospel it is a sinner who anoints Jesus's feet and then wipes them with her hair.<sup>74</sup> The only fragment of Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* published in his own lifetime (in 1870) was a dialogue scene between Salomé and her governess and contains a long discussion on the beauty of Salomé's golden locks. In the letter Massenet allegedly addressed to his librettist Paul Milliet asking for a libretto centred on the mystical sensuality and sensual mysticism of both love and religion (cited

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<sup>70</sup> Massenet uses this device again to underline expectancy of fulfilment in Hérode's aria "Vision fugitive" in which Hérode expresses his infatuation for and carnal desire of Salomé. Gérard Condé (at 76, 80, 86 & 94) also notes the presence of the second inversion chord during the opera.

<sup>71</sup> Salomé: "Qu'à tes genoux, s'épande l'or de mes cheveux! Oui! c'est toi seul que j'aime! O Jean!"

<sup>72</sup> Hérode: "Que ma lèvre effleure l'or de tes cheveux!"

<sup>73</sup> Odon Vallet, *Le Honteux et le sacré* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 40. In Western society today, married ultra-orthodox Jewish women wear wigs to cover their heads that have been shaved in order to deprive them of the sensual power represented by their hair.

<sup>74</sup> St. Luke 7, 38. The other three gospels attach Jesus's anointment to the passion story and Mary of Bethany. Matthew and Mark affirm that Mary anoints Jesus's head whilst John's Mary, like Luke's sinner, anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair.

earlier), Massenet was also supposed to have qualified his wish with the example of “a woman’s hair [which] would be considered a man’s hair shirt.”<sup>75</sup> Massenet’s mention of a woman’s hair, therefore, gives weight to the dramatic significance of Salomé’s locks: Mallarmé’s Salomé is obsessed by them, the opera’s Hérode can only dream of them, and Salomé literally offers to spread her hair at Jean’s knees. As Hérode fantasises about Salomé in the aria “Vision fugitive” (which will be discussed in detail in chapter three), her hair is the last thing he ‘sees’ before the culmination of his musical and sexual ecstasy, and Salomé’s offer to spread her golden hair before Jean in the same breath as a declaration of love presents not only a highly sensual picture, but also leads us to think of the hair elsewhere on Salomé’s body.<sup>76</sup> It is precisely due to the erotic intensity of this image that Jean, hot under the collar, has to break away from Salomé’s amorous dialogue and begin to think as a preacher and not as a potential lover. Jean utters an aghast “Never!” at Salomé’s offer of love, in reaction to which she panics: her “It is you, you alone that I love!” is an urgent and impassioned declaration. Jean, therefore, begins his ‘sermon’ with the deliberately ambiguous verses, much cited by the critics: “Love me then but as if in a dream! With the mystic fervour born of ideal love, transfigure the love that consumes your senses!”<sup>77</sup> Jean’s Christian message, however, invokes many of the images contained in Flaubert’s characterisation of Iakokannan cited above: a new beginning, a liberation of souls that soaring may be uplifted to the glories of heaven, new faith blossoming like the rose, its perfume lightly scenting that heavenly kingdom where gold will replace clay.<sup>78</sup> It is, indeed, the first and last prophetic statement uttered in the opera by Jean.

At the start of this duet, Massenet’s musical portrayal of the differences between Salomé’s and Jean’s respective thoughts and of that which passes between them is

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<sup>75</sup> Schneider, “un petit poème d’amour où tout ce qui est mystique dans l’Eglise serait appliqué à la passion sensuelle, où par exemple, les cheveux de la femme seraient considérés comme le cilice de l’homme.”

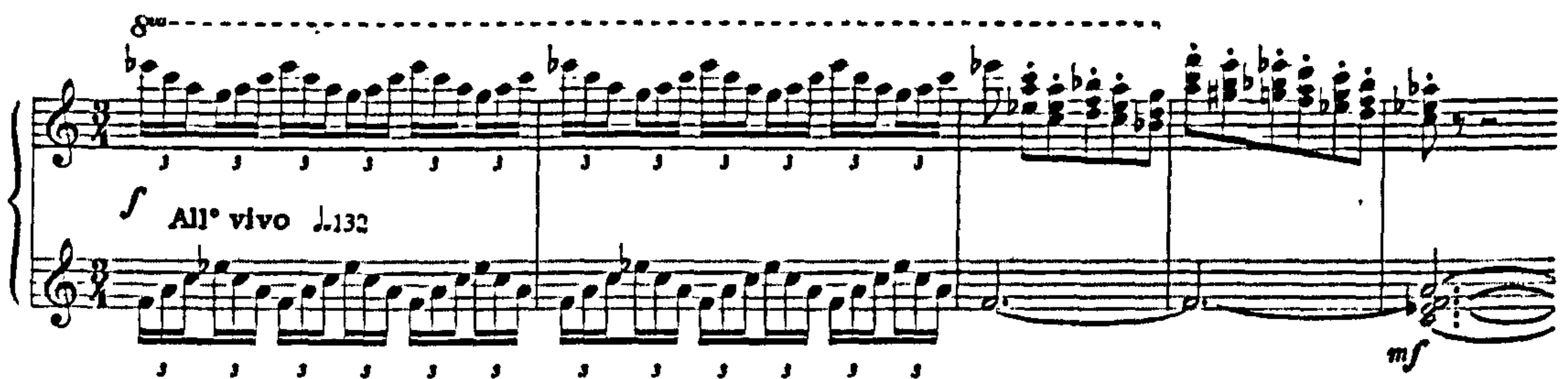
<sup>76</sup> In his discussion of an Aubrey Beardsley illustration of Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*, Lawrence Kramer notes how Salome’s hair is drawn as a spider’s web, and refers the reader to Elizabeth Gitter’s ‘The Power of Woman’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 99, 1984, 936-54. Therefore, a woman’s hair is an erotic image but also, in a more decadent interpretation, a snare in which ‘prey’ may be caught. See Kramer, ‘Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3, 1990, 269-94, at 277.

<sup>77</sup> Jean: “Aime-moi donc alors, mais comme on aime en songe! Dans la mystique ardeur où l’idéal te plonge, transfigure l’amour, qui consume tes sens!”

<sup>78</sup> See Act I, scene 4.

enlightening. Jean is preoccupied with his divine purpose and destiny, his vocal line reflecting a sense of religiosity by use of a chant-like recitative. Salomé's entry and greeting are, however, underpinned by the expectant motif associated with Salomé the exotic dancer full of 'eastern promise', this time based on a dominant seventh chord in Bb major, the key of her previous eulogistic aria to Jean.<sup>79</sup> [Example 3. Compare to the first three bars of Example 1b.] His reply is accompanied by a dominant chord of E major, the key furthest away from Bb, thus firmly but briefly establishing the ground between them, both musical and ideological. It is only after a brief but tortuous modulation that resolves onto a dominant seventh chord in E major, that Jean regains his composure and turns to Salomé as her spiritual mentor.

### Example 3



Salomé's declaration of love is a lilting  $12_8$  melody, accompanied by a solo violin and viola. The same music continues as Jean repeatedly dwells on Salomé's opportunity to love. As at the start of the duet, however, Jean regains his composure and his sense of religious purpose. Massenet imposes a sudden key and tempo change: an animated section begins with a cadence into C major, underpinning Jean's words "My own destiny is very different!"<sup>80</sup> Throughout Massenet's operatic oeuvre, white-note C major is used to evoke high moral standards, godliness and purity.<sup>81</sup>

Massenet was not alone in such a use of C major. Gounod was reported to have said, towards the end of his life when his preoccupations turned to things theological, that

<sup>79</sup> Goldstrom (161) discusses the exoticism and, hence, eroticism of this motive, affirming that it confirms Salomé's "position as a purely sexual entity within this biblical landscape." Karen Henson believes this motive to "effect a kind of 'rupture' in the opera's timbral surface", and discusses at length its placing in the different versions of the opera and its capacity to evoke the image of Salomé as a sensual dancer. See Karen Henson, *Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Doctoral thesis, Oxford, 1999, 30-91.

<sup>80</sup> Jean: "Pour moi, tout autre est le destin!"

C major was the key in which God existed.<sup>82</sup> Gounod's work certainly bears witness to this belief, examples ranging from Marguerite's Act III prayer and final apotheosis in *Faust* to the Credo of his 1878 opera *Polyeucte*, based on Corneille's 'Christian tragedy', that tells the story of third-century Romans who convert to Christianity, only to die for their beliefs during the persecutions.<sup>83</sup> However, it was in the late-eighteenth century that C major became associated with purity. Rita Steblin's study of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century descriptions of key characteristics has shown that composers and theorists associated individual keys with specific affective qualities.<sup>84</sup> Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart's *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst* and Justin Heinrich Knecht's *Gemeinnützlichendes Elementarwerk der Harmonie und des Generalbasses* both use the word "pure" to describe C major.<sup>85</sup> Through the course of the nineteenth century, a C major trope was established, closely associating the key with the forces of good, whether sacred or secular. Both Beethoven, in *Fidelio* (1815), and Weber, in *Der Freischütz* (1821) used C major in conjunction with C minor to represent the forces of good and evil (respectively),<sup>86</sup> and this opposition of C major and minor was revisited by Meyerbeer and Gounod in the depiction of their diabolical characters in *Robert le Diable* (1831) and *Faust*

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Athanaël in *Thaïs*; Alain's description of Grisélidis's pure beauty "Voir Grisélidis, c'est connaître" from the prologue to *Grisélidis*; much of the music of the character of Don Quichotte in Massenet's opera of the same name, etc.

<sup>82</sup> James Harding, *Gounod* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 205-6.

<sup>83</sup> Steven Huebner, *The Operas of Charles Gounod* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 300-2.

<sup>84</sup> Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1983), relied upon by Gretchen A. Wheelock and cited in her 'Schwarze Gredel and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart's Operas' in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 201-21, at 201-2.

<sup>85</sup> Schubart's volume was written c. 1784 and published in Vienna in 1804. Knecht's monograph was published in four volumes in Augsburg between 1792 and 1798. See Wheelock, 208. Schubart, who seems to have influenced E. T. A Hoffmann's synaesthetic linking of keys to colours and emotional states, also added the descriptions "innocence, artlessness, naiveté". (See Hugh Macdonald, '9, Gb major', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, XI/3, Spring 1988, 221-37, at 222-3.) Indeed, the playful, rejoicing connotation of C major, subsisting from earlier eighteenth-century treatises, persisted in early nineteenth-century operas such as *Fidelio* and *Der Freischütz*. In *Der Freischütz*, the artless, young Aennchen is given solo arias only in C major. Her Act I aria "Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen" is given added simplicity by a bucolic oboe obbligato. Her Act III aria is immediately followed by the bridesmaids' chorus (also in C major). The virginal purity of both Aennchen and C major are thus reinforced.

<sup>86</sup> In these two operas, C major resounds in rejoicing choruses for the assembled common people as good triumphs over evil. Two other good examples of the triumph of love that are portrayed in movements from C minor to C major are to be found in Mozart's operas *Idomeneo* (1781) and *Die Zauberflöte* (1791). [See Wheelock, 218-9.] Haydn used C minor and major in a more strictly religious sense at the opening of *Die Schöpfung* (1798). C minor represents the 'dark' world without God, whilst at the words "Let there be light", the harmony is flooded with an impressive C major chord.

(1859). Like his predecessors, Massenet uses C major to evoke the pure and Godly nature of Jean's destiny, thereby implying Jean's consciousness of what lies before him.<sup>87</sup> Jean's tender rejection of Salomé's suit becomes more concrete but by no means any easier. His words "No I do not want to listen to you!.. Leave me!.. Get away!.. Poor naïve and tender soul!.." <sup>88</sup> are rhythmically turbulent and impassioned, and the vocal line comprises copious accented semitonal appoggiaturas to depict Jean's torment.

As Jean's resolve is put sorely to the test in the face of Salomé's desperate and amorous panic, Massenet introduces the harps. The use of the harp carries double semiotic meaning in French opera of the nineteenth century. In the same way that the organ and 'angelic' voices (either those of women or children) or chorale-like vocal treatment are used to signify religiosity, the harp evokes the celestial realm. Pure C major also finds its spiritual home in this context, and Massenet, as well as Gounod and Meyerbeer before him, generally uses a combination of these four elements to refer to heaven.<sup>89</sup> However, in the third act of Massenet's 1879 opera, *Le Roi de Lahore*, both arpeggiated harp chords and a *cappella* chorus are used—two elements more traditionally associated with Christian devotional music—in the depiction of the paradisiac garden of the god Indra, and thus to represent an antique, exotic and 'pagan' spirituality. The sensual 'garden of Eden' in *Le Roi de Lahore* prefigures the enchanted isle and fairy gardens in Act II of *Esclarmonde* (1889) in which the harp is also prominently used. Both tableaux recall the Venusberg scene and ballet from Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* (1845, Paris première 1861). The resemblance is stronger in Massenet's later opera where *Esclarmonde* summons her lover to the

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<sup>87</sup> C major is also used for Phaniel's aria as he asks the heavens to reveal Jean's identity. At the reprise of the opening theme in this ABA-structured aria, an A major chord resolves onto a C major chord (in second inversion) with accompanying high celestial rippling harps as Phaniel reiterates his question "Quel est ce Jean ? est-ce un homme ?.. est-ce un Dieu ?..". The reprise of the opening of the aria is enough to justify the return of the original C major, but Massenet's use of the harps, for the first time in this scene, and the second inversion chord add new meaning to the way in which Jean's ministry may be interpreted. The harp's celestial dimension is tempered by the sensuality that goes hand in hand with Christian faith. Thus Massenet seems to permit Jean his sexuality whilst reinforcing his prophetic status. However, the lack of a tonic chord in root position at this juncture also leaves the listener with a query as to which of these two characteristics (sexuality versus spirituality) will dominate, a question which will only be answered by the events which follow.

<sup>88</sup> Jean: "Non je ne veux pas entendre!.. Laisse-moi!.. éloigne-toi!.. Pauvre âme naïve et tendre!.."

<sup>89</sup> See particularly the final *Apothéose* of Gounod's *Faust*. Meyerbeer's grand opera *Le Prophète* (1849) is spectacular in its deployment of a children's choir and an organ duet (à 4 mains) in the Act IV Coronation scene, and of four solo harps during both Fidès's cavatina at the start of Act V as she

island by occult means for nights of passionate love-making, Massenet, like Wagner before him, using an off-stage women's chorus introduced by the harp, allied to high strings and woodwind, to evoke a harem-like, magical land.<sup>90</sup> Massenet's musical depiction of Esclarmonde's paradisiac gardens and her erotic and supernatural powers is one step further removed from the sensual pagan spirituality in *Le Roi de Lahore* and thus exploits the full range of interlinked signifiers allotted to the harp during the nineteenth century in France.<sup>91</sup>

The popularity and widespread influence of Boieldieu's opéra comique *La Dame blanche* (1825) on the nineteenth-century French musical and cultural conscience had contributed to the supernatural connotation to the use of the harp. Reference to or appearance of Boieldieu's heroine, a ghostly protector of the Castle of Avenel (in fact, the mortal Anna in disguise), is always accompanied by rippling harps.<sup>92</sup> As the 'white lady' incarnates an angelic figure, Boieldieu's work closes the gap between the heavenly (whether Christian or pagan) and the supernatural. Neither Massenet nor Saint-Saëns, therefore, used harps purely to represent Christian eternity. In his 1877 opéra *Samson et Dalila*,<sup>93</sup> Saint-Saëns first uses harps to accompany Samson's prayers to and evocations of his Old-Testament, warrior-like, Jewish God. However, as Ralph P. Locke points out, Samson, in his opposition to the Eastern, Dagon-worshipping Dalila, would have been perceived not only as a divinely inspired

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imploring heavenly grace for her wayward son, and in Jean's vision of heaven—comprising angels singing to harp accompaniment—during the Act III finale.

<sup>90</sup> Venus's theme in the overture to *Tannhäuser* comprises what may be described as seductive harmonic language—extended, chromatic chords, accented appoggiaturas that prolong and displace resolution—similar to that used by Massenet to support Hérodiade's sensual charm.

<sup>91</sup> In his *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration modernes. Nouvelle édition revue, corrigée, augmentée de plusieurs chapitres sur les instruments récemment inventés, et suivie de l'Art du Chef d'Orchestre* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1855), 80-1, Berlioz states: "Nothing more agreeable with the notion of religious pomp than the sound of a large mass of harps used ingeniously. Alone, or in groups of two, three or four, they also produce a most felicitous effect." ["Rien de plus sympathique avec les idées [...] de pompes religieuses, que les sons d'une grande masse de harpes ingénieusement employée. Isolément ou par groupes de deux, trois ou quatre, elles sont encore d'un très heureux effet."] Berlioz goes on to detail the different registers of the harp, affirming that the strings of the last octave "possess a delicate, crystalline sound of voluptuous freshness which lends itself to the expression of graceful, magical ideas and to murmur the sweetest secrets of laughing melodies." ["Les cordes de la dernière octave supérieure ont un son délicat, cristallin, d'une fraîcheur voluptueuse, qui rend propres à l'expression des idées gracieuses, féeriques, et à murmurer les plus doux secrets des riantes mélodies."]

<sup>92</sup> *La Dame blanche* also used harps 'strummed' to accompany the ancient song of the Avenel clan. For *Tannhäuser*'s hymn in praise of Venus (*Tannhäuser*, Act I, "Dir töne Lob! Die Wunder sei'n gepriesen"), Wagner used a similar solo harp accompaniment to evoke medieval troubadour song. Massenet took up this style of accompaniment for Alain's 'chanson' in Act II of his medieval opera *Grisélidis*.



Hebrew leader, but also as a prefiguring of Christ and thus of Western civilisation.<sup>94</sup> In spite of this Judeo-Christian association with the harp, or perhaps because of it, the radically anticlerical and republican Saint-Saëns also used the harp prominently in the oriental, pagan devotional music of Act III. In both the second exposition of the *Bacchanale* dance theme, as well as the *malinconico* motive comprising the 'classic' oriental augmented second, the harp plays a significant part in the musical portrayal of the decadent Philistines.<sup>95</sup> Dalila and the High Priest's frenetic devotion before the flaming altar as Dagon arises from the ashes to reveal his presence and power also provides an important role for the harp. The use of harps in *Hérodiade* belongs to their more traditional use in a (Christian) sacred context which does not exclude sensuality, although it avoids the overtly erotic overtones with which the harp can be associated in *Esclarmonde*, *Le Roi de Lahore* or *Samson et Dalila*.

The use of the harp also seems to be feminised. All of the examples cited above ally the harp to the female voice. Salomé sings of her religious devotion accompanied by harps, and during the Holy March in Act III of *Hérodiade*, Massenet deploys the harps to accompany a violin melody doubled at the octave above (rather than high voices) as the women of Jerusalem enter the Temple. This association between harps and women, therefore, seems to equate religious faith in eternity with the female sex in a similar way to that in which women in France during the second half of the nineteenth century were identified with the Church.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the popular cult of the Virgin meant that the Church was reciprocally embodied by womankind. As discussed in the previous chapter, women's education, morals and principles had been defined by clerical instruction; the anti-progressive Church advocated unquestioning faith for women, whilst public positivist and scientific society taught men to analyse and reason. Women's social conditioning thus highlighted certain qualities such as intuition and emotional (rather than reasoned) views, reactions and

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<sup>93</sup> The opera was premiered in Weimar and was not performed in Paris until 1890.

<sup>94</sup> Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns's "Samson et Dalila"', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3/ 3, 1991, 261-302, at 271 & 274.

<sup>95</sup> Used in Carmen's 'fate' motive, Locke refers to the augmented second of the Arab Hijaz mode as "strikingly 'foreign'", and to its repeated use in the *Bacchanale* as an example of standard Orientalist practice of emphasising the "[sedimentary] residues ... of what differs most' from Western practice." See Locke, 266-7. See also Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: "Carmen"*, Cambridge Opera Handbook, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65-6.

<sup>96</sup> The suitability of the harp for female performers no doubt helped to reinforce this equation of the harp and the feminine.

judgements that were then interpreted as natural female and feminine traits. The feminisation of the musical instrument that evokes the celestial realm thus reinforces the notion of the illogical yet seductive nature of the Christian faith.

In *Hérodiade*, as Salomé utters Jean's name in their Act I duet, harps sound a two-bar, arpeggiated Eb chord. This musical moment can be read in two ways. The harp's celestial connotation might denote Salomé's willingness to accept merely Jean's spiritual love, as it is immediately followed by Jean's religious message. However, the ecstatic introduction of harps, which leads one to imagine the possible equation of earthly and heavenly 'paradise' intimated already in *Le Roi de Lahore* and later in *Esclarmonde*, precedes Jean's deliberately ambiguous message, "Love me then but as if in a dream! With the mystic fervour born of ideal love, transfigure the love that consumes your senses!" These words are underpinned by an equally ambivalent musical accompaniment, Johannes Weber qualifying Jean's musical phrase in his review of the première as having "nothing mystical about it; it is rather a passionate expression".<sup>97</sup> [Example 4.]

The vocal line is interspersed (and then doubled) by a rising chromatic melody played by the clarinet, saxophone, bassoon and horn, accompanied by shimmering violin texture. In Act III of *Le Roi de Lahore*, the sensuality of the Eastern paradise—the ballet takes place at this point in the opera amongst luxurious tropical vegetation—was conveyed by the use of a waltz for saxophone.<sup>98</sup> Massenet's use of the saxophone in *Hérodiade* once again adds a specific quality to the orchestration. The influence of Berlioz's instrumentation treatise was immense, not only on successive generations of French composers, but also directly upon Liszt, Wagner, even Strauss and Mahler.<sup>99</sup> Massenet highly respected Berlioz's monograph which suggests that the timbre of the saxophone is useful for "gracious cantilenas and

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<sup>97</sup> Weber: "rien de mystique; elle a plutôt une expression passionnée."

<sup>98</sup> By nineteenth-century standards, the waltz, where couples held each other closely, was considered a rather daring dance.

<sup>99</sup> Hugh Macdonald, 'Berlioz', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, vol. 3 (London: MacMillan, 2001), 384-420, at 406. Macdonald claims that Berlioz 'emancipated' orchestration, that "in his hands timbre became something that could be used in free combinations as an artist might use his palette, without bowing to the demands of line, and this leads to the rich orchestral resource of Debussy and Ravel."

Example 4

Andante  $\text{♩} = 76$   
JEAN (inspiré)

Al - me - moi donc a - lors, mais comme on aime en

*p* *rall.*

*ff* *ffp*

*8va* (violins)

a Tempo

son - gel.. Dans la my - tique ar - deur

*f*

(clarinet, saxophone, bassoon, horn)

(+ harps)

(+ tympan)

*f sostenuto e ben canto*

*8va pp*

où l'i - dé - al te plon - ge Trans - si - gu - re l'amour qui con - su - me tes sens

(+ cor anglais)

*8va pp*

Ban - nis tous les trans - ports d'un sen - ti - ment pro - fa - ne.

*pp*

religious and dreamy harmonic effects.”<sup>100</sup> Of the clarinet, Berlioz comments “Nothing is more virginal, nor more pure than the colour given to certain melodies by the timbre of a clarinet played in the middle register.”<sup>101</sup> Thus Jean’s melodic line is qualified by a pure and religious orchestration, but one that also admits the idea of dreams. Indeed, Massenet followed this duet with Hérode’s erotic dream “Vision fugitive” in which many of the same musical and even literary elements reappear,<sup>102</sup> and in particular the use of the saxophone which serves to add a undercurrent and subtle impetus to Hérode’s desire for Salomé. Therefore the sensual ambiguity of Jean’s religious message, also directed towards Salomé, is developed in Hérode’s aria to create a wilful confusion of mysticism and eroticism in the orchestration, which supports similar notions in the libretto. Indeed, having heard Hérode’s aria, it is difficult to take seriously the awkward sentiments expressed by Jean. Knowing what “mystic fervour” does for Hérode’s senses (that being far from transfiguring his all-consuming love as we shall see in the next chapter), makes us doubt Jean’s sincerity.

Jean’s melodic phrase that characterises this passage [see Example 4] is, however, first introduced into the opera by Salomé in Act I, scene 1. Here, Salomé recounts to Phaniel Jean’s warm welcome of her, and her plan to seek him out. Either, therefore, she has already heard Jean’s sensual message (indeed it is that which attracts her back to him), or it is Salomé herself who gauges the language which Jean uses, for, perhaps, Jean tells Salomé only that which he thinks she wants to hear. In either case, his position as a religious man is compromised. Despite Jean’s first real prophetic utterances in their Act I duet, Jean’s impassioned enthusiasm that follows reuses his motive, this time accompanied by those ‘celestial’ harps. That Jean’s message has

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<sup>100</sup> Berlioz, 284: “cantilènes gracieuses et aux effets d’harmonie religieux et rêveurs.” Cormac Newark, in drawing a parallel between orchestration and positivist notions of science and progress from the 1830s onwards in France, describes orchestration as “a science becoming more sophisticated by the day, and one to which Berlioz’s own *Grand Traité d’Instrumentation et d’Orchestration modernes* subsequently became central.” He goes on to claim that “the section on saxophones [...] is [...] a set of instructions for sounds of the future.” See his ‘Metaphors for Meyerbeer’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127, 1, 2002, 23-43, at 29-30.

<sup>101</sup> Berlioz, 138: “Rien de virginal, rien de pur comme le coloris donné a certaines mélodies par le timbre d’une clarinette jouée dans le *médium*.”

<sup>102</sup> Along with the second inversion chord used to express expectancy, hope and doubt in the music of Phaniel, Salomé and Hérode, this kind of recall seems to constitute a semiotic code that functions during the opera — a dramaturgy of sonority where previous connotations and contexts of orchestral or harmonic sound allow the listener to infer meaning in successive uses of similar instrumental and/or harmonic configurations.

had no detrimental effect on Salomé's love for him becomes evident when the scene ends with a reprise of the opening music and a reprise of Salomé's seemingly unchanged confession of love. Jean's religious message thus appears to be truly indistinguishable from his humanly sensual one. To add to the irony, Jean sings of new faith, life and immortality, as Salomé simultaneously reiterates her love for him. Indeed, Jean presents all the traits that the Canadian Father Chiniquy denounces in the nineteenth-century clergy: he appears as the charming and fallen priest, a victim of his own success due to the ambiguous notions of love that he preaches, and which are thus interpreted by unworldly young women. As a God-appointed priest, Jean should be above responding to the female attention he receives or, at the very least, know how to avert it. Through the course of the opera, whilst somehow managing to divert and convert Salomé's zeal, Jean's own response to her amorous discourse sends him down the slippery slope to unGodliness.

The final scene between Jean and Salomé (Act IV) confirms certain doubts raised over Jean's ministry and character. He expresses the belief that his imprisonment is due to his inability; and, therefore, unwillingness to "repress the ardent impulses of faith".<sup>103</sup> He is "unable" because his humanity outweighs his Godliness and unwilling because, as a human being, he can make that choice. According to Jean, it is his faith that drives him to make unacceptable statements and lands him in prison. He regrets nothing of his earthly life except Salomé, about whom he reminisces to a varied form of the Act I duet theme, played by horns, saxophone and woodwind, accompanied by high tremolando strings and harps. This leads into an animated section in F major with many tempo changes (which imbue the music with a sense of petulance and indecision) in which Jean asks God "O Lord, if I am your son, tell me why you suffer love to come and shake my faith?",<sup>104</sup> culminating in the stage direction "he falls, overcome".<sup>105</sup> The use of the saxophone and the final stage marking remind the audience, both aurally and visually, of Hérode's carnal desire for Salomé during "Vision fugitive". Thus, by use of a dramatically and musically referential language, Massenet creates a subtle shift in the nature of Jean's longing for his disciple.

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<sup>103</sup> Jean: "Ne pouvant réprimer les élans de la foi". Act IV, scene 13.

<sup>104</sup> Jean: "O Seigneur, si je suis ton fils, dis-moi pourquoi Tu souffres que l'amour vienne ébranler ma foi?"

As Salomé appears, Jean excitedly launches into a still reticent, but highly sensual, outpouring of love, finally telling Salomé that he loves her. Whilst seeking his God's blessing for his actions, Jean manages to convince himself of the righteousness of his amorous intentions (he is once again the victim of his own success), even declaring them to be without blasphemy. This represents a distinct reversal of roles, for it was Salomé, in Act I, who openly stated that for Jean to accept her love would not be blasphemous.<sup>106</sup> But subtly, Salomé does not reiterate her Act I declaration of love: "quivering and nearly overcome",<sup>107</sup> she merely repeats what she hears from Jean's lips. Thus it seems that through the course of the opera, Salomé's view of Jean does change from potential lover to prophet, and despite her hero worship of Jean-the-man and Jean-the-God, Salomé seems to succeed in transfiguring her earthly passion—as Jean exhorted her to do in Act I—and appears less than reassured at Jean's avowal of love. She thus temporarily acts as a heroic figure whose moral uprightness saves those around her for, as in Act III, Salomé manages to convince Jean of his true destiny. As Jean's execution is announced, Salomé insists on staying with him, not as his lover—she rejects the idea of an earthly union as being against God's will—but as a fellow martyr: "I, leave you? When Heaven calls us! [...] If God had allowed it, with a happy and enraptured soul I would have spent my life at your side; God did not will it; so I shall die close to you, in your arms, o sublime martyr!"<sup>108</sup> Inspired by Salomé's spiritual stature and her faith in him, Jean accepts Salomé's terms and compares their deaths to the extinguishing of a pure flame and their love to a heavenly light that will attain immortality.

Jean's declaration of love uses a suave harmonic construction comprising a half-diminished chord approached by an accented major-seventh appoggiatura in the vocal line. Salomé's musical reaction is a nervous, fragmented chromatic melodic line, confined to a narrow, low tessitura, which only intensifies in response to Jean's growing passion. Yet as Salomé offers to die alongside Jean, so her musical language

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<sup>105</sup> 'il tombe accablé'.

<sup>106</sup> As Salomé's statement in Act I is swiftly followed by the highly erotic image of her golden hair (as discussed earlier), it is hard to understand how she ever believed that their love would not be blasphemous.

<sup>107</sup> 'palpitante et presque sans force'.

begins to introduce the subtle mix of mysticism and eroticism of Jean's previous rhetoric, for her melody in chaste C major is accompanied by a countermelody, with chromatic alterations, played by the saxophone. This quality to the music is amplified as the couple's celestial *Liebestod* is translated by an increasingly ecstatic unison duo accompanied by tutti orchestra and lyrical strings. Chaste C major and austere G minor are gradually abandoned as the opening motive of their impassioned theme, which is based on an extended diminished seventh chord, is successively repeated, each time a semitone higher, a dynamic level louder and accompanied by a transposed diminished seventh. Their confusion of spiritual and carnal love is completed in the words "Rapture of love, inflame us forever!":<sup>109</sup> both singers' melodic lines reach a fortissimo high C in an ecstatic climax before Salomé and Jean fall into each others arms. Thus, despite what may be read as pure intentions on Salomé's part, the couple's 'spiritual' union is accompanied by a dramatic situation similar to any operatic love duet, complete with copious embraces,<sup>110</sup> and by music of an almost irrationally ecstatic emotion whose purpose—spiritual or sensual—is impossible to decipher.<sup>111</sup> Salomé's original feelings for Jean may have evolved but, with a little encouragement from him, she quickly falls into his arms without too many scruples. Like the corrupt clergy stereotypically described by Michelet (and others), Jean manipulates his 'penitent' not for the glorification of God but for this own gratification.

### Salomé, Hérodiade and Motherhood

Salomé's faith and trust in Jean is, therefore, comparable to the relationship that nineteenth-century anticlerical commentators perceived between women and their confessors. The sense of isolation from their husbands experienced by these women was bound up with the differences in men's and women's education and the definition of a separate sphere for women which reinforced their link with the

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<sup>108</sup> Salomé: "Te quitter, moi? Quand le ciel nous appelle! [...] Si Dieu l'avait permis, l'âme heureuse et ravie, à tes côtés, j'aurais passé ma vie; Dieu ne l'a pas voulu; je saurai donc mourir près de toi, dans tes bras, ô sublime martyr!"

<sup>109</sup> Jean and Salomé: "Transport de l'amour, embrase-nous toujours!"

<sup>110</sup> See pages 80-4 of the original staging book which shows Salomé continuously throwing herself into Jean's arms. (Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, H6 (I).)

<sup>111</sup> Despite this musical portrayal, and ignoring the intentional ambiguity of both music and text at this moment, Goldstrom (166-70) reads this climax as the fulfilment of Salomé's and Jean's platonic love through delirious expectation of eternal love. He affirms that as throughout the opera the protagonists' 'love duets' do not reach the sort of musical climax (interpreted as orgasm) as the one in Act II of *Esclarmonde*; they purely provide musical illustration of thwarted sex.

Church. And yet Salomé's isolation is more pronounced: Salomé has no husband, but she has no family either, and her attachment to Jean is defined by her need for human tenderness and a 'family' to call her own. Salomé has no *patrie*; she is lacking that vital quality, that cauldron of national identity and pride that the harmonious patriarchal family was seen to represent during the Third Republic, with its recurrent demographic problems. She has, unknowingly, a mother, but this far from conventional figure is also judged by nineteenth-century standards during the opera. It is not until the third act that Hérodiade admits to her maternal status. Hérodiade, unlike Flaubert's Hérodiades, is jealous of her husband's affections for another woman. In Act III, the vulnerable Hérodiade looks to the stars, ordering Phanuel to divine the destiny and confirm the identity of her rival for Hérode's love in order that she may avenge herself. It is only at this point that Hérodiade discovers that her rival for Hérode's affections is, in fact, her long-lost daughter, Salomé.

Hérodiade's maternal affection is brief. In her duet with Phanuel, she dreams only of how the selfless love of a child could have saved her heart and mind from love's disappointments and her preoccupation for vengeance. The librettists, therefore, put the 'moral of the story' into Hérodiade's own mouth: the love of a child could have redeemed this woman, and she could have developed a more traditional concept of what a woman and mother should be. The autograph vocal score of this scene contains a slightly longer version than the definitive orchestral score, and the discrepancies between the two versions add to our understanding of the character of Hérodiade.<sup>112</sup> In the earlier version, Phanuel evokes Hérodiade's parental home, a time when she was innocent, happy and satisfied with life, a time when she watched over a growing and beloved infant.<sup>113</sup> Yet in the final version of this scene, Phanuel's

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<sup>112</sup> The autograph full score of this tableau forms the slimmer fourth volume of the 1880/81 autograph full score (B.n.F., Opéra, Rés. A. 736 a (I-IV)). Inserted later, it is dated inside the opening page, 22 January 1882. The autograph vocal score of this tableau (B.n.F., Opéra, Rés. 811 (2)) is dated Paris, Friday 6 January 1882, and dedicated to "mon excellent ami Julien Torchet [en] souvenir de la 1<sup>ère</sup> (à Milan) févr. / 82, J. Massenet."

<sup>113</sup> This text is accompanied by music based on the chromatic, dotted-noted, descending motive of the Allegro maestoso section at the start of the dialogue scene which immediately precedes this section. The Allegro maestoso section is dominated by two characteristic rhythms: a dotted quaver, plus semiquaver (used repeatedly to form a fateful, chromatically descending motive), and a twice repeated triplet semiquaver figure. Both these configurations appear in pages 12 to 16 of B.n.F., Musique, Ms. 4278 (8) (undated), which comprises eleven pages (pages 6-16) of piano score, ballet music in Massenet's hand. Pages 6 to 11 are the third and fourth numbers of the opera's Act IV ballet music, "Les Gauloises" and "Les Phéniciennes". Pages 12 to 16 are marked "Final", and whilst containing these two above-mentioned rhythmic elements, do not correspond to the Bacchanale-like ballet finale



speech is cut, thus diminishing Hérodiade's 'history'. In both versions, at the revelation of her daughter's identity and at the sight of Salomé, Hérodiade violently rejects her child, even affirming that her daughter no longer exists for her. By her utterance "my daughter is dead... and I no longer have a child!..",<sup>114</sup> Hérodiade foretells Salomé's later suicide and hence rejects her own status as a mother. Phaniel 'endorses' this idea at the end of the tableau with his statement: "Pitiless, fateful Queen! Go, you are but a woman... a mother, never!"<sup>115</sup> For Phaniel, as for all traditionalists, whether Catholic or Republican, a woman's fulfilment of her *devoir conjugal*, without the use of any contraception, in effect ennobled woman to a higher station in life. Hence, as neither a woman (whose inherent qualities are unworthy without the contact of man) nor a queen, does Hérodiade command the respect due to a mother.<sup>116</sup>

The emotion she expresses in relation to her lost child is selfish, and whilst 'pure' C major accompanies her first maternal reminiscence, Hérodiade's musical language thereafter retains a sensual chromaticism used during moments of seduction throughout the opera: she may be able to feel some degree of sincere maternal tenderness but the overtly sexual side to her character is very much present. The whole of this tableau for Phaniel and Hérodiade was written after the Brussels première. The final scene in the opera witnesses the revelation of Hérodiade's and Salomé's respective identities, unveiling the bond between mother and daughter. Therefore, Massenet drew the musical substance of the lyrical duet which closes the new scene in Act III, and whose text concerns Hérodiade as a mother, from the final scene of the opera. In the new tableau, Hérodiade, here in a duet with Phaniel, takes over the upper melodic line of the vocal texture, the one sung by Salomé in Act IV. By appropriating Salomé's vocal line, the invisible link between Hérodiade and her

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of the later score. Massenet having rewritten, therefore, his ballet finale, must have made use of these pages in his composition of the Allegro maestoso section of the new Phaniel/ Hérodiade duet. (The former ballet finale may have been discarded only in June 1881: the autograph full score dates the orchestration of the ballet's fourth number "Les Phéniciennes" to June 1880, yet the finale (no. 5) to 12 June 1881.)

<sup>114</sup> Hérodiade: "ma fille est morte... et je n'ai plus d'enfant!.."

<sup>115</sup> Phaniel: "Reine impitoyable et fatale! Va tu n'es qu'une femme... une mère, jamais!"

<sup>116</sup> Phaniel's condemnation is, however, somewhat softened in comparison to the autograph vocal score of this scene, for the original version's extended description of Hérodiade's former happiness highlights that which Hérodiade 'threw away' in order to ally herself with Hérode.

daughter is reinforced.<sup>117</sup> And yet Phanuel's 'thunderous' contempt for Hérodiade at the end of the scene completely quashes the notion of any morally indissoluble link between mother and daughter. Accompanied only by an ominous forte-piano timpani roll, an accented minor ninth chord is sounded by the strings as Phanuel all but spits the word "femme". [Example 5.] This chromatic, extended chord, previously associated with Hérodiade's seductiveness in Act II (to be discussed shortly), allied to the timpani roll can be read as a musical signifier of diabolical female sexuality.<sup>118</sup> Phanuel's condemnation of Hérodiade thus throws her sexuality, more concerned with pleasure than duty, back in her face.

### Example 5

PHANUEL  
(avec emportement et d'une voix lointaine)

Reine im - pi - toy - able et fa - ta - le, Va. tu n'es qu'une

fem - me u - ne mè - re... ja - mais

Stesso allegro

*fp* *sub.*

All° *sf* *p* All° vivo assai 176

At the end of the opera, the subject of Jean's imminent demise opens the dialogue between mother and daughter. Salomé pleads with Hérodiade, firstly as the queen, then as a woman and finally as a potential mother: "Have pity! If you were a mother!

<sup>117</sup> In Act IV, Salomé pleads for Jean's life to this melody. Therefore, that which was defined as a seductive musical language for Hérodiade in Act III also comports an element of seduction as Salomé tries to win Hérodiade over.

<sup>118</sup> The diminished-seventh or its close relative, the minor-ninth chord played tremolando and allied to a timpani roll is frequently used in nineteenth-century opera to denote the devil, as in Weber's *Der Freischütz*. McClary notes (66, 83), however, in relation to Bizet's *Carmen*, that late nineteenth-century composers more strongly associated the evil of diabolic imagery with female sexuality.

Pardon him! Have mercy!”,<sup>119</sup> reinforcing Phanael’s idea that motherhood ennobles woman to a higher station in life than any other earthly or civil promotion. Salomé launches into a varied and extended reprise of this duet, appropriating what was previously Hérodiade’s melodic line and, hence, reinforcing their undeniable bond, as she pitifully pleads for Jean by revealing the maternal gap he filled in her life, a gap left by an “inhuman” mother who abandoned her. On seeing and hearing Salomé’s pain, maternal tenderness is, once again, reawakened in Hérodiade’s heart. Massenet underpins Salomé’s “peine” by the same minor ninth chord used during Phanael’s disgusted dismissal of her unworthy mother. Its association with Hérodiade’s evil sexuality informs the listener’s understanding of Salomé’s anguish: Massenet directly links Salomé’s turmoil and its cause. By nineteenth-century standards, therefore, Salomé is a truly pitiable figure. As Hérodiade responds to Salomé’s story, which is both factually and musically reminiscent of her own history, Hérodiade remembers her former feelings and music, taking control of the melodic line for the *più mosso* section of the duet. However, this spark of affection is as quickly put out as it was lit, as Salomé goes on to condemn the incestuous marriage that took her mother from her.<sup>120</sup> As the duet music is repeated by the assembled soloists, Hérodiade wants to reach out to her daughter but is stopped by her hurt pride, damaged at the same time by Salomé’s scorn of her (as she thinks, absent) mother and her own sense of unworthiness.

These scenes of repressed maternal emotion are reminiscent of a short passage at the beginning of Flaubert’s tale:

After her divorce, she [Hérodias] had left this child in Rome, hoping to have others by the Tetrarch. She never spoke of it. [...] The velarium had been unfurled and large cushions had been brought out for them. Hérodias sank onto them and cried, turning away. Then she passed her hand over her eyelids, said that she no longer wanted to think about it and that she was happy [...].<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Salomé: “Pitié! si tu fus mère! Grâce pour lui!”

<sup>120</sup> Herodiade was in fact Herod’s niece, as well as the wife of his brother before becoming his wife. Incest is defined as sexual relations between two persons who are too closely related to marry in any given society. (See *Le Petit Larousse Grand Format 1996* (Paris: Larousse, 1995); *Collins Concise English Dictionary*, Third edition (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1993).) Jewish law, personified by John the Baptist, condemned the marriage of Herod Antipas and Herodiade on the grounds of Herodiade being the former wife of Herod’s brother (who was still alive) and not because she was his niece. (See St. Matthew 14, 3-4; St. Mark 6, 18; St. Luke 3, 19.) French law also condemned marriage between ‘in-laws’, considering it to be ‘second degree’ incest. So whilst guilty of ‘first degree’ incest (the Antipas couple being uncle and niece), their union is considered incestuous due to their relation by marriage.

<sup>121</sup> Flaubert, 105: “Après son divorce, elle [Hérodias] avait laissé dans Rome cette enfant, espérant bien en avoir d’autres du Tétrarque. Jamais elle n’en parlait. [...] On avait déplié le vélarium et apporté

Flaubert's *Hérodias* does not need indignation or divine guilt to smother her remorse at her former actions; she is a stronger, emancipated woman, she knows her purpose, knows not to regret the past but to look to the future. The libretto's *Hérodiade* carries within her the deep wound of separation from her daughter and sincere regrets for the past, as a true Third-Republican mother should, which make her vulnerable to Salomé's curse of her unworthy mother. As the executioner arrives with a bloodied sword, Salomé, blaming *Hérodiade* who was on the point of pardoning Jean,<sup>122</sup> moves to strike *Hérodiade* with a dagger. It is only in the face of this vengeful act (worthy of *Hérodiade* herself) and in fear for her own precious life that *Hérodiade* is persuaded to part with the secret of her and Salomé's identities. For Salomé, Jean's love has replaced the maternal affection she so craved. Her real mother, *Hérodiade*, can never live up to the ideal Jean in Salomé's heart and mind, and Salomé, unable to bear the shame of her parentage, turns the dagger on herself. Salomé thus renounces her lineage, and denies *Hérodiade* any right to know her daughter, but also, in the eyes of her Third-Republican audience, denies *Hérodiade* any chance of social redemption for her anti-republican crimes:<sup>123</sup> Salomé effectively punishes her, as both the Church and the Republic would condemn unworthy mothers outright. *Hérodiade* flings herself upon the lifeless body in a final maternal outpouring come too late, at last truly admitting their relationship, as if by so doing she could will her daughter to live again. But, it was *Hérodiade* who brought Salomé into the world, and it is the fulfilment of *Hérodiade*'s earlier denial of the life of her child that effectively renders her responsible for Salomé's death.

### **Hérodiade**

It is not only *Hérodiade*'s unconventional experience of motherhood that marks her out as socially unacceptable, particularly to late-nineteenth-century moral standards. Her character also serves as a foil to Salomé's devout and devoted compliance, for *Hérodiade* is an independently-minded, separated woman living with *Hérode* in an 'illegal' union. Her incestuous liaison was the reason behind the curses heaped upon

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vivement de larges coussins auprès d'eux. *Hérodias* s'y affaissa, et pleurait, en tournant le dos. Puis elle se passa la main sur les paupières, dit qu'elle n'y voulait plus songer, qu'elle se trouvait heureuse [...]."

<sup>122</sup> See the original staging book. Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, H6 (I), 95.

<sup>123</sup> Annegret Fauser, "...C'est vraiment trop voluptueux!" Zur Entstehung und musikalischen Dramaturgie von Massenets "*Hérodiade*", *Wiener Staatsoper Programme*, 1995, 11-22, at 22.

Hérodiade by the biblical John the Baptist. His infamous cry of “Jézabel!” is included in the opera’s first act but this biblical attack on Hérodiade’s lifestyle also echoes the nineteenth-century Church’s patriarchally defensive and even, at times, diabolical condemnation of all that went against its moral code. But it was not only the Church which was concerned with the marital status of women. The debate over the legal and penal inequalities between men and women guilty of adultery, and the issue of divorce, was at a height at the beginning of the 1880s in France. For conservative thinkers of all political parties, the possible reinstatement of divorce was one more step towards the dissolution of the family; divorce’s emancipation of women dissolved the family in the same way that radical republicanism’s emancipation policies dissolved the nation.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the pagan, decadent, pleasure-seeking Rome prior to the fall of the Roman Empire was seen to present a striking analogy with contemporary society by traditionalists: scepticism, the thirst for luxury and material wealth and divorce were diagnosed as the factors that had engendered Rome’s downfall, devastating the nation’s moral fibre and social structure, just as they would signal the fall of the Third Republic.<sup>125</sup> It was within this social climate that Massenet and his librettists took on the task of representing a ‘divorced’ and politically ambitious female protagonist, titling their opera with her name. Indeed, Hérodiade epitomizes all contemporary male fears, whether republican or clerical, of emancipated woman: she seems to have lost nearly all sense of female naivety, modesty, tenderness and emotion. However, the opera’s Hérodiade is somewhat stripped of her masculine and hence emasculating attributes,<sup>126</sup> in comparison to Flaubert’s character or to the historical character as described by Ernest Renan in his *La Vie de Jésus*.<sup>127</sup> The opera reduces Hérodiade to a vindictive woman, a betrayed

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<sup>124</sup> Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 148.

<sup>125</sup> Clarisse Bader, *La Femme Romaine. Etude de la vie antique* (Paris: Didier, 1877), xi-xv.

<sup>126</sup> Berenson notes (113-6) that the Prussian conquest of the French was compared to women’s conquest over men (i.e. the feminist emancipation movement) and that the two ideas were reciprocal, for the masculinisation of women seemed to signal not just the feminisation of men but the emasculation of France and society as a whole.

<sup>127</sup> Renan, 105: “Violente, ambitieuse, passionnée, elle [Hérodiade] détestait le judaïsme et méprisait ses lois. Elle avait été mariée, probablement malgré elle, à son oncle Hérode, fils de Mariamne, qu’Hérode le Grand avait déshérité, et qui n’eut jamais de rôle public. La position inférieure de son mari à l’égard des autres personnes de sa famille ne lui laissant aucun repos; elle voulait être souveraine à tout prix. Antipas fut l’instrument dont elle se servit.” [“Violent, ambitious, passionate, she detested Judaism and scorned its laws. She had been married, probably against her wishes, to her uncle Herod, son of Mariamne, that Herod the Great had disinherited, and who had never had a public role. The inferior position of her husband, with regard to the other members of her family, gave her no rest; she wanted to be queen at any price. Hérodiade used Antipas to her own ends.”] Flaubert, 108:

wife, an ageing queen and a bad mother (not even a manipulative one as in the original Bible story).

Hérodiade is also portrayed as politically enterprising in both Flaubert's novel and the libretto. Flaubert's Hérodiade appears more ambitious than the operatic heroine, being closer to the Hérodiade of Renan's monograph: both Flaubert and Renan depict Hérodiade as having a real political history and determined ambition. Milliet and Grémont, however, reduce these traits to one scene in Act II when Hérodiade takes control of the assembled crowd of allies, summoned by Hérode for a war council in his plan to overthrow Roman authority. Despite a certain degree of autonomy gained from her experience of 'divorce', the opera's Hérodiade still has to ally herself to men—both Hérode Antipas and his brother Hérode Philippe<sup>128</sup>—in her quest for power. Indeed, she needs male support due to the emancipated autonomy that she enjoys. As a divorcee whose incestuous marital history is known to all, Hérodiade would be considered a social outcast in the republican, yet highly traditional, bourgeois society to which the authorial team belonged. By her association with Hérode Antipas, Hérodiade can at least gain surface respectability and position, as well as a facade behind which she is freer to pursue her personal and political ambitions.

As trumpet fanfares announce the arrival of Vitellius, Hérodiade scorns Hérode's ill-considered public display of aggression towards Rome, but ardently and tenderly reassures Hérode that she loves him and prizes his life over her own, and declares herself able to fool the approaching Romans. Hérodiade knows how to play the republican role of the perfect associate-wife, and so she appears only momentarily to take charge, not for her own political ends, but for those of her adored if perturbed husband. Her words during the edgy chorus that follows Vitellius's entry, however, reveal the real Hérodiade: the woman who detests her husband's cowering before the Romans and who reproaches him for having left her out of his battle plans. She also

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"Depuis son enfance, elle nourrissait le rêve d'un grand empire. C'était pour y atteindre que, délaissant son premier époux, elle s'était jointe à celui-là, qui l'avait dupée, pensait-elle." ["Since childhood she dreamt of a great empire. It was to realise her dream that she left her first husband and was then united with Antipas, who had deceived her, she thought."]

<sup>128</sup> Renan convincingly explains that both Matthew's and Mark's Gospels mistakenly cite Hérode Philippe as Hérodiade's first husband, instead of Hérode, son of Mariamne. Indeed, Salomé later became the wife of Hérode Philippe.

announces her own triumph and fulfilment of her wishes. Hence, does Hérodiade actually have an agenda of her own while presenting Hérode with a strong wife and partner? One can only presume that it is Hérodiade's intention to be rid of Jean and to avenge herself of any potential rivals for Hérode's affection for she has, as yet, shown no political ambitions independent of those of Hérode.

Musically, Hérodiade's authority is imposed by suspending both the arrival of off-stage Roman fanfares and their diatonicism. Firstly, her recitative-like vocal entry interrupts the steady march rhythm of the trumpet fanfares. Then, by means of a chromatic vocal line and a seventh-chord chromatic harmonic progression based on the Eb of these fanfares, the course of the Romans' music is diverted. [Example 6.] Hérodiade then launches a charm-offensive on Hérode. Her highly charged musical language combines triple rhythms with whole-tone appoggiaturas suspended over diminished seventh and augmented sixth chords.<sup>129</sup> [Example 7.] As with Carmen's *Habañera*, the use of such rhythmic, harmonic and melodic languages imbues this music with a highly seductive quality.<sup>130</sup> It is rather the musical discourse of an 'immoral' woman, a manipulative wife or a courtesan.<sup>131</sup> In her desertion of one husband and her incestuous alliance with Hérode, Hérodiade showed total disregard for the Mosaic law of the Jewish society within which she lived. Historically, therefore, and abetted by Jean Baptiste's vociferous condemnation of her actions, Hérodiade has not necessarily always been perceived, nor judged, as Hérode's wife. The première critic Weber noted that as Hérodiade had "trampled underfoot respect for the law, she was, therefore, only Hérode's mistress. That is also what she is in Massenet's opera, the proof being the manner in which she speaks to Hérode and the unkind way in which he treats her; she bothers him all the more since he has been enamoured of Salomé."<sup>132</sup> Indeed, Weber almost admonishes Hérodiade's character

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<sup>129</sup> This progression is emphasised by a bold Italian sixth chord as Hérodiade switches to her public persona and prepares to face the Romans at the Allegro [see Example 7].

<sup>130</sup> Late nineteenth-century French opera makes use of a semiotic opposition between diatonicism and chromaticism. The former musical language is associated with simplicity and directness whilst chromaticism tends to signify the complicated and emotionally charged. Susan McClary (75-7) notes that "in her musical discourse, she [Carmen] is slippery, unpredictable, maddening, irresistible."

<sup>131</sup> For a similar musical language underpinning a manipulative Hérodiade, see her "Ne me refuse pas" in Act I, scene 3 as she tries to convince Hérode to sentence Jean to death.

<sup>132</sup> Weber: "foulé aux pieds le respect dû aux lois, elle n'était donc que la maîtresse d'Hérode. C'est ce qu'elle est aussi dans l'opéra de M. Massenet; la preuve en est dans la matière dont elle parle à Hérode et dans la façon, peu aimable dont celui-ci la traite; elle l'importune d'autant plus qu'il est épris de Salomé."

Example 6

Hérodiade paraît au haut de l'escalier - d'un geste elle a imposé silence à la foule qui, frappée de stupeur, écoute les farces romaines encore très lointaines. - Tous s'arrêtent interdits.

HÉRODIADE (ironiquement et avec autorité) All.  
più agitato

*f* Vous qui te-nez con - seil sur les pla - ces pu - bli - ques... 144

*p*

Ces - sez donc un ino - nent... vos ap - pels hé - ro -

i - ques; E - cou - tez! é - cou - tez! là -

bas... Vous en - ten - drez mon - ter les pas Du con - sul et de son es - cortel..

for pestering Hérode about his adoration of the actual courtesan, Salomé, and Hérode's incestuous lust for his stepdaughter and niece are equated with his somewhat more traditional relationship with Hérodiade.



Example 7

Hérodiade (à Hérode, à part) (avec ardeur et tendresse)

Toi, ne trem-bles plus. Ton ex-is-ten-ce m'est plus

chère... plus chère que la mien-ne... que la mien-ne... Hé-

ro-de... je t'ai-mel... Je sau-rai les trom-per!

In Flaubert's story, the mutual contempt of a couple whose marriage has long since died is very clearly shown. Both Hérodiades and the opera's Hérodiade try to awaken the marital flame of passion, but in both cases, she is rejected. Flaubert's Hérode is tired of twelve years of war, fanned by Hérodiades's ambition;<sup>133</sup> Milliet and Grémont's Hérode is preoccupied particularly by Jean, provoked by Hérodiade's demands for Jean's execution in revenge for his denunciation of her.<sup>134</sup> Despite their embittered union, Flaubert's Hérodiades seeks no vengeance on her rivals for Hérode's

<sup>133</sup> Flaubert, 105: "Il la repoussa. L'amour qu'elle tâchait de ranimer était si loin, maintenant! Et tout ses malheurs en découlaient; car depuis douze ans bientôt, la guerre continuait. Elle avait vieilli le Tétrarque." ["He pushed her away. The love that she was trying to reignite was so far away now! And all his troubles stemmed from it; for the war had been fought for nearly twelve years now. It had aged the Tetrarch."]

affections; indeed she scorns Hérode's Arab first wife as an unsophisticated peasant, and, seeing his arousal at the observation of a young beautiful woman, loses interest in her husband altogether.<sup>135</sup> Later in Flaubert's tale, when Hérode seeks solace in Hérodiad's company, he finds her in her aromatic chamber, occupied with a female slave.<sup>136</sup> Flaubert's Hérodiad is the fin-de-siècle gender reversal nightmare come true; she is 'masculinised' to the point of lesbian sexual tendencies. Echoing anti-emancipation thought, Flaubert's Hérodiad has become a corrupt element within society. Although she has already had a child, since her emancipation (i.e. her divorce, the realisation of, at least some of, her political ambitions and her mastering of her emotions), Hérodiad has neutered herself, emasculated her husband and rendered herself sterile.<sup>137</sup> The decadence of Flaubert's text is not reflected in Milliet and Grémont's portrayal of a more traditionally female and feminine Hérodiade. However, the opera's Hérodiade can be seen to prevent the eventual realisation of Hérode's political aim to overthrow the Romans: Hérode's nation can never be a strong one, for his wife and his marriage are immoral and corrupt, even if appearances (as constructed by Hérodiade in Act II) are deceiving. It is precisely during this battle rally scene that Hérodiade, 'meddling' in politics, seals the fate of her husband's campaign. Hérodiade's domineering intervention, accompanied by the imposition of her music, not only silences the Roman fanfares but her husband too. In this way, she effectively emasculates Hérode and his ability to launch and/or win any offensive. Even the blame for Hérode's incestuous desire of Salomé can be laid at Hérodiade's door, as Salomé is but a recreation, however unaware, of her mother.

### **Jean Baptiste (and Phanuel)**

Massenet's opera was titled with Hérodiade's name and works through many issues relating to nineteenth-century women: marriage, motherhood, divorce, emancipation. However, an anticlerical and lay republican slant is given to the story of the opera by the portrayal of Jean Baptiste, which invites a multitude of sometimes conflicting interpretations, depending on the standpoint of the various protagonists and the Third-Republican audience. As already shown, Salomé views Jean Baptiste as a

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<sup>134</sup> Hérode: "Non! je ne puis... Je dois céder à la raison. Aimé des Juifs, consolant leur misère... Cet homme est fort... partout on le révère!" [Hérode: "No! I cannot... I must be reasonable. Loved by the Jews, consoling their misery... This man is strong... he is revered everywhere!"] See Act I, scene 3.

<sup>135</sup> Flaubert, 108-9.

<sup>136</sup> Flaubert, 128-9.

serene, charitable preacher who welcomes her into his community, and the affection she receives from him allows her to grow, both spiritually and morally. However, due to the libretto's and the music's ambiguous treatment of Jean Baptiste's mystical ideas, liberally mixing the metaphors for spiritual and physical *jouissance*, he could have been viewed by late nineteenth-century audiences as similar to the corrupt Catholic confessors so vehemently denounced by anticlerical commentators. In step with the fashion for the religious erotic (whether sacred or secular), and 'feminised', decadent tendencies in modern Catholic devotional practices (as discussed in chapter one), Jean willingly confuses spirituality and sensuality in his preaching, and particularly in his relationship with an impressionable young woman.

However, the opera also depicts a John the Baptist who wears the traits of his cousin Jesus. The relationship between Jean and Salomé was easily equated with that between Jesus and Mary Magdalen by the contemporary press. Moreover, the history of Jesus is interwoven with that of Jean Baptiste—Christ's judgement by Pontius Pilate and the events of the Passion story in general. And yet Jean's ideological and theological position in the opera is somewhat unusual, and his prophecies do not precede the spiritual ideas of the Messiah. In the light of nineteenth-century humanist theology, Ernest Renan's enormous influence on the contemporary perception of biblical characters, and Massenet's and his librettists' perceived penchant for this type of characterisation, one might have expected Jean Baptiste to be used as a mouthpiece for Renan-based ideas of Jesus. However, the operatic Jean never expresses the few, simple ideas—God as a loving, forgiving father, purity of heart, human fraternity—which Renan believed to be the sum total of Christ's teachings. Nor does Jean perceive himself as a precursor, spreading the news of a new spiritual leader whom he believes will overturn the established order. Only during his duet with Salomé in Act I does Jean Baptiste briefly speak of a "new faith" and a "dawn of life and immortality", statements which are undermined by Salomé simultaneously declaring her all human passion for the 'prophet'. The opera's humanist portrayal of John the Baptist sidelines his public and political persona, but neglects positivist theology in order to concentrate on human relationships, and in this case, love and the human failing of a religious figure.

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<sup>137</sup> Berenson, 101. Flaubert points out that Hérode and Hérodiás have had no children.

And yet Renan was categorical about the differences in character of Jean and Jesus. In his version of *La Vie de Jésus*, Renan wrote that in spite of the common ground between Jean's and Jesus's ministries, "It seems that he [Jean] did not possess, even in embryonic form, the great idea that was Jesus's triumph; the idea of a pure religion."<sup>138</sup> Thus, the opera's characterisation of Jean can be seen to be directly influenced by Renan's view of John the Baptist, without any reference to or conflation with Christ. It is rather Phaniel, the court advisor, who represents the true Messianic figure of the opera, preaching Jesus's message of "Love! Forgiveness! Eternal life!" A slightly occult character, Phaniel is all-seeing and all-knowing; only Phaniel perceives Jean as Christ's precursor and constantly reminds the audience (and Jean) of Jean's majestic prophetic destiny. During the Act III star-gazing tableau, Phaniel's music is accompanied by the stage directions "prophetically" and "under the prophetic influence", markings that are never used in relation to Jean. Indeed, it is during this scene that Phaniel consults the stars for an answer to Jean's identity. In Flaubert's tale, Phaniel reports to Hérode: "The Almighty sends one of his sons from time to time. Iaokanaan is one of them. If you oppress him you will be punished."<sup>139</sup> This prophecy is reiterated at the final feast by a certain Jacob's revelation of the belief that Iaokanann is, in fact, Elijah reincarnate, Elijah's return preceding that of the Messiah.<sup>140</sup> In the opera, Phaniel plans to study the heavens all night to discern Jean's destiny but the libretto provides no answers. Phaniel then presents a description of Jean that corresponds more to the image of an Old Testament prophet, such as Elijah or Moses, spreading the message of revolt to an oppressed people. The Gospels, Renan (in his *La Vie de Jésus*) and Flaubert also paint a similar picture of a severely spoken, ascetic and hermitic John the Baptist.

Indeed, instead of being an instrument of Renan's Messianic ideas, the operatic Jean acts more often as a mouthpiece for contemporary Catholicism, and his public ideas would have been read as politically contentious by *fin-de-siècle* republican audiences. In the second tableau of Act II, Jean, the Roman proconsul Vitellius and

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<sup>138</sup> See Ernest Renan: *Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1995), 102: "Il ne semble pas qu'il [Jean] possédât même en germe la grande idée qui a fait le triomphe de Jésus, l'idée d'une religion pure."

<sup>139</sup> Flaubert, 110: "Le Très-Haut envoie par moments un de ses fils. Iaokanann en est un. Si tu l'opprimes, tu seras chatié."

Hérode are brought into direct confrontation, each character declaring his own spiritual and/or political agenda. This masterfully, if conventionally, constructed ensemble finale addresses the ideas of secular, civic authority and human justice—as opposed to divine right—and serves to underscore the opera’s authors’ view of republicanism—as opposed to Catholic obscurantism—as the way forward for modern society. Massenet and his librettists successively introduce the different characters and social groups to the scene, attributing each its own carefully delineated musical language. Vitellius arrives proclaiming his authority by saying: “I represent Caesar and justice here.”<sup>141</sup> As Ancient Rome provided the example of republican government to which Third Republic leaders aspired, Vitellius’s role in the opera may be read as a character aligned with their ideals. However, Vitellius barely has the time to implement Caesar’s justice (complying with the Jews’ wishes regarding the Temple), when Jean and his followers, representative of the Church, make their dramatic, Passion-like entrance.

Salomé makes her entrance, proclaiming Jean “the prophet of the living God” before the proconsul Vitellius who rather thinks him a madman. She again defends Jean’s status in Act III as Hérode ardently presses his suit. Salomé insultingly rejects Hérode by claiming that the one she loves is greater than Caesar or any other hero. As a proto-Christian woman, Salomé can be seen to resemble Michelet’s Mary figure: she is represented as a devout woman, devoted to her confessor, his willing *faire-valoir*, and declares the ‘clergy’s’ supremacy over both ‘republican’ and civic authority. As the assembly takes stock of this spectacle, Jean himself daringly confronts Vitellius’s republic by launching into an unprovoked attack on Vitellius’s authority. Musically, Jean’s entrance has already had this effect: Roman fanfares are interrupted and cut off by his arrival which is accompanied by rippling ‘celestial’ harps and a Hosannah sung by ‘angelic’ voices, in fact off-stage Canaanite women. [Example 8.] However, Jean’s declamation “All justice comes from Heaven! Man, your fragile power will break at the feet of the Eternal like a clay vessel!” goes one

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<sup>140</sup> Flaubert, 133-5.

<sup>141</sup> Vitellius: “Je représente ici César et la justice.”

Example 8

**Allegro**  
**LES ROMAINS** *ff*

Sa - lut au Pro - con - sul à Ti - bère à Cé -

**LES MESSAGERS**  
**et la FOULE** *ff*

Sa - lut au Pro - con - sul aux Ro - mains aux Sol -

Sa - lut au Pro - con - sul aux Ro - mains aux Sol -

Sa - lut au Pro - con - sul aux Ro - mains aux Sol -

*ff* **Allegro**

*Fanfares romaines en octave*

This musical score is for a section titled 'Example 8'. It features four vocal parts and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is 'Allegro' and the dynamics are 'ff' (fortissimo). The vocal parts are for 'LES ROMAINS' and 'LES MESSAGERS et la FOULE'. The lyrics are in French. The piano part includes a section of 'Fanfares romaines en octave'.

**Andantino con moto**  $\text{♩} = 76$

*Stesso in recitativo* *f*

Ho - san - - - - - mah!

ma! Sa - lut

da! Sa - lut

da! Sa - lut

da! Sa - lut

*ff*

**Andantino con moto**

This musical score is for a section titled 'Andantino con moto'. It features four vocal parts and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is 'Andantino con moto' with a metronome marking of 76. The dynamics are 'ff' (fortissimo). The vocal parts have lyrics in French. The piano part includes a section of 'Fanfares romaines en octave'.

Example 8 continued

Au moment où VITELLIUS, HÉRODE, PIANUEL et LES ROMAINS  
 vont se diriger vers le palais, on entend les voix des CANANÉENNES. Tous s'arrêtent.  
 Bientôt paraissent JEAN et SALOMÉ - des enfants les précèdent, des femmes les suivent,  
 agitant des palmes fraîches.  
 Les blanches étoiles de la lune les enveloppent comme dans une auréole.

Ho - san . . . . . sa! Ho .

VITELLIUS s'arrête, surpris des témoignages de respect et d'amour que l'on donne à JEAN. (en scène, au fond du théâtre)

san . . . . . sa! Ho - san - sa! Ho -

*dim.* *p*

san . . . . . sa! Gloire à ce - lui qui vient au

sa - ni - du Sei - . . . . . gneur!

step further.<sup>142</sup> It is a provocative stance in the face of civic Roman (republican) authority which resembles the reactionary outbursts of the Catholic Church in the face of hot anticlerical argument during the Third Republic.<sup>143</sup> It also introduces the

<sup>142</sup> Jean: "Toute justice vient du ciel! Homme, ta puissance fragile se brise aux pieds de l'Éternel comme un vase d'argile!"

<sup>143</sup> The printed staging book (held at the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, H6 (I), 45) signals that Jean appears to defy Vitellius with his declaration that "All justice comes from heaven", and that at his last repetition of this phrase, Vitellius orders his lictors to arrest Jean. In another reading of the complex allegorical interpretations possible during the Act II finale, Hérode is loosely cast as representative of Napoléon III. For more detail see my '*Hérodiade: Church, State and the*

debate concerning justice and its provenance, an important ideological issue in the ever more secular France of the second half of the nineteenth century which was debated throughout the political spectrum, but particularly by such lay figures as Proudhon, Flaubert, Maria Deraismes and Juliette Lamber.

What must have sounded to republican ears as Jean's reactionary clerical ideas are clearly underlined by Massenet's music. The simple melodic line outlining diatonic triads to which Jean proclaims his heavenly justice, is underpinned with the theme associated with Jean, and criticised by the critic Johannes Weber.<sup>144</sup> [Example 9.]

### Example 9

JEAN à VITELLIUS et à la foule (avec un accent inspiré)

However, this theme is more associated with the charming Jean with whom Salomé has fallen in love: its chromatic melody (bracketed in Example 9) is played by the clarinet, saxophone, bassoon and horn, and is accompanied by high tremolando, shimmering violins. The motive which Weber termed as a “passionate expression” (rather than a mystical one), first heard in Jean and Salomé’s Act I duet in which Jean demands an “amour mystique” from Salomé to replace the physical one she is experiencing, is thus reiterated for Jean’s public proclamation of dogma: Jean seems to possess only one form of musical rhetoric. But by its very nature, it is invariably unsuitable, for all his interventions. The ambiguity of sentiment it expresses—forming part of the *topoi* for the suave intertwining of sensuality and ecstatic mysticism in music—never seems to clarify Jean’s ideas. Unlike Jesus in the

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Feminist Movement’, in Jim Samson & Bennett Zon (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Music: Selected Proceedings from the Tenth International Conference* (London: Ashgate, 2002), 248-76.

<sup>144</sup> After his initial defiant stand in this Act II, scene 7, Jean uses the demagogic rhetorical device of doggedly repeating his opening declaration of the heavenly provenance of justice twice over, the second time louder and a tone higher than the first. Using syllabic word setting, the phrase is sung on one pitch which is repeated for the length of a whole bar, accompanied by high tremolando strings and spread harp chords. In response, the Canaanite women enthusiastically proclaim him their hero whilst the Roman sympathisers support their own camp. The same homophonic and syllabic music is thus simultaneously appropriated by the supporters of the Church and of republican Rome.



early *Marie-Magdeleine*, whose musical language remains much more formally classic, diatonic and four-square, Massenet deliberately seems to portray Jean as a charismatic demagogue and leaves the audience to draw its own conclusions as to his sincerity, and the sanctity of his motivation.<sup>145</sup>

However, the operatic conflation of the characters of Jesus and Jean is once again reinforced during Jean's Act III trial and judgement. Vitellius is shown to be an astute leader during the opera for despite the fact that he has ordered the arrest of Jean, he flatters Hérode's ego by handing him the responsibility of judging Jean, a manoeuvre in direct contrast to Flaubert's text.<sup>146</sup> However, it is in keeping with Pontius Pilate's actions during the trial of Jesus on Good Friday: Vitellius, representing Rome, plays the role of Pilate. In St. Luke's gospel, the only synoptic gospel to mention this fact, Pilate does actually send Jesus to Hérode, for, like Vitellius, he realises that, as a Galilean, Jesus falls under Hérode's jurisdiction, and anyway, Pilate can find no good reason to condemn Jesus, despite the High Priests' accusations.<sup>147</sup> The Hérode of St. Luke's gospel finds Jesus more intriguing than dangerous, and purely a figure of mockery, just like Pilate. At his trial in Act III, however, the operatic Jean is presented by the High Priests to Hérode as a political and religious agitator who calls himself the 'King of the Jews', and Hérode is confronted by an aggravated crowd that call for Jean's crucifixion. Thus the martyrdoms of Jean and Jesus are equated in the libretto. In this way, the Jews,

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<sup>145</sup> Massenet is reported to have asked his librettist Paul Milliet for "un petit poème d'amour où tout ce qui se trouve de mystique dans le culte de la religion chrétienne serait appliqué à la passion sensuelle et réciproquement" ["a kind of love libretto in which all that is mystical in the cult of the Christian religion would be applied to sensual passion and vice versa"]. Citation taken from Gérard Condé, 'Commentaire musical', *L'Avant-Scène Opéra, Massenet, Le Roi de Lahore, Hérodiade*, 187, November/December 1998, 74-114, at 74. This citation seems to originate with Paul Milliet and has been repeated by Massenet's biographers from Louis Schneider onwards. A slightly varied version is given in an article by Louis Schneider on the occasion of the Parisian première in French of *Hérodiade* in 1903. See his 'Théâtre de la Gaîté. « Hérodiade »', *L'Art du Théâtre*, 35, November 1903, 177-85, at 178.

<sup>146</sup> In Flaubert's novel, Vitellius takes responsibility for guarding Jean, and Hérode actually expresses relief that Jean is no longer in his charge. See Flaubert, 126-7.

<sup>147</sup> St. Luke, chapter 23, verses 6-12. From *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 1059-60: "On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies."

traditionally held responsible for the death of the Messiah by nineteenth-century anti-Jewish Catholicism,<sup>148</sup> are also assigned responsibility for the death of Jean Baptiste. The operatic Vitellius is perhaps even more astute than Pilate in his complete renunciation of responsibility for Jean's judgement to Hérode. In one fell swoop, the operatic Rome effectively disassociates itself from the Church and keeps itself clear of any awkward situations and particularly of the accusation of ordering the death of Jean/the Messiah. In the opera, therefore, 'republican authority' is seen deftly to disassociate itself from religion just as the French Third Republic rejected clerical influence through implementation of its secularisation policy, culminating in the separation of Church and State in 1905.

As Jean is led to trial, his humility and radiance are briefly remarked upon, yet due to the novelty of this countenance for the people, the crowd cynically interprets his modesty as a sham to inspire lenient treatment from the authorities. "Calm and inspired", Jean serenely prays for Godly inspiration before his trial. The 'Interrogatoire' begins peacefully: a tranquil Jean simply affirms his identity and his humble beginnings. Hérode's questioning becomes more probing and provocative, gradually eroding Jean's calm exterior. As Hérode asks whether Jean has inflamed

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<sup>148</sup> Whilst traditional anti-Jewish Catholicism—the Jews being responsible for the death of the Messiah—was omnipresent in nineteenth-century French society, Jean-Marie Mayeur ('La France bourgeoise devient républicaine et laïque' *Histoire du peuple français*, 5 (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1967), 47-246, at 172-3) claims that at the beginning of the Third Republic, anti-Semitism hardly existed. Indeed, Madeleine Rebérioux (in *La République radicale? 1898-1914, Nouvelle histoire de la France contemporaine*, 11, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1975), 31) insists that it was only during the 1880s that Catholic and socio-economic anti-Judaic feeling, of anti-capitalist tendencies, fused to form a national brand of anti-Semitism, culminating in the intense debate surrounding the Dreyfus Affair between 1897 and 1899. Whilst *fin-de-siècle* anti-Semitism was represented by the openly xenophobic hatred of the Assumptionist press, fuelled by Edouard Drumont's 1886 monograph *La France juive*, early anti-Jewish feeling was more one of mistrust and hostility. Clarisse Bader, in her book *La Femme biblique*, is but pityingly dismissive of the Jews, professing that they "are energetically attached to the ancient beliefs of which, by misfortune, the spiritual soul escapes them." [Clarisse Bader, *La femme biblique. Sa vie morale et sociale, sa participation au développement de l'idée religieuse* (Paris: Didier, 1866), 433: "se rattachent énergiquement aux antiques croyances dont, par malheur, l'âme leur échappe."] Ernest Renan, a clergyman who rejected the sacerdoce and the Catholic Church, did not, however, reject his culturally Catholic prejudices against the Jews. Published in 1863, Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* ventures into occasional attacks on the Jews, and the citation below seems to have heavily influenced the opera's portrayal of their nation. Renan offers: "One of the principal faults of the Jewish race is its bitterness in controversy and the offensive tone that is nearly always added to it. In history there have never been more lively quarrels than those of the Jews amongst themselves. It is the feeling for nuance that makes man moderate and polite. Hence, the lack of nuance is one of the most frequent traits of the Semitic mind. [See Renan, *Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1995), 201: "Un des principaux défauts de la race juive est son âpreté dans la controverse et le ton injurieux qu'elle y mêle presque toujours. Il n'y eut jamais dans le monde de querelles aussi vives que celle des juifs entre eux. C'est le sentiment de la nuance qui fait l'homme poli et modéré. Or la manque de nuances est un des traits les plus constants de l'esprit sémitique."]

the people with his prophesising, an ominous, errant bassoon motive is complemented by a four-chord sequence in strings, similar to that accompanying the Jews' cry for "la liberté" in Act II. Goaded further by the aggressive tone of Hérode's question concerning his intended weapons, Jean's reply rises in tone and pitch. Determined to provoke Jean into anger, Hérode brutally demands his aim, again supported by the "liberté" chords. [Example 10.] Jean's explosive response shatters his humble image, the tone and pitch of his melodic line soar, and he finally admits his purpose to be "la liberté".

### Example 10

The musical score for Example 10 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Hérode (bass clef) and Jean (treble clef). Hérode's line is in 12/8 time and features a melodic line with a fermata. Jean's line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a rising melodic line. The piano accompaniment is in 12/8 time and features a four-chord sequence in the right hand and a more active line in the left hand. The lyrics are: Hérode: "Quel est ton but en-fin?...", Jean: "Mon but: La li - ber - té!". The piano part includes the word "sauvez" in the right hand.

The opera's Jean thus also presents radical, revolutionary characteristics, not only harshly condemning the immorality of the ruling couple, but also claiming "freedom" as his purpose when publically interrogated. Whilst the Revolutionary connotations of the word "liberté" must have made an impact on Third-Republican audiences, Jean never actually specifies from what or from whom he wishes to liberate himself and his followers. Indeed, via musical reference, Massenet infers a link between the freedom demanded by the Jews and that claimed by Jean: they are both cries against oppression. And yet the Jews claims are satisfied and guaranteed by a secular republican regime, a scenario which would seem incompatible with the sort of dogma outlined by Jean in the second tableau of Act II where he defies Vitellius's authority. Jean's claim for freedom provokes general stupor and disbelief from the on-stage onlookers, and is immediately construed by the High Priests as a politically insensitive insult to Caesar. Set in the context of Act II, it seems a valid interpretation. During the general confusion and uproar, however, Hérode invites

Jean to join his cause against the Romans in exchange for his life. For indeed, Hérode perceives Jean's call for freedom as a radical, revolutionary statement. For Phanael alone, the unstable political situation of Hérode's reign is very much linked to the teachings of the Scriptures, the fulfilment of their prophecies and the coming of the Messiah. Hérode, however, is blind to these facts, and once having used Jean's influence, Hérode intends to quash him. Phanael warns Hérode against martyring Jean, and in Act III pleads for Jean's life before an angry crowd which calls for his blood.

Jean disdainful rejects Hérode's proposal of an alliance, but it is not enough to convince Hérode that Jean should die; it is Salomé's appearance and declaration "His life gave me life and his death will be my death, Oh! let me share his fate!",<sup>149</sup> which provokes Hérode's jealousy (for he is in love with Salomé, who has rejected him) and gets the better of his reason as he condemns them both to death. Salomé is thus responsible for Jean's execution in both the biblical story and the opera. In the biblical tale, Salomé's demand for Jean Baptiste's head on a platter as a reward takes much of the responsibility away from both Vitellius and Hérode. Her right to demand is, however, a result of the raw sex appeal she exudes in her famous dance of the seven veils. In the opera also, despite the absence of her famous dance, it is the effect of her physical appearance on the besotted Hérode, as well as her public declaration of fidelity for Jean (containing the first notions of his death as a certainty), that seals Jean's fate and effectively takes the responsibility out of Hérode's irrational hands.

Not only does Salomé, however, assure Jean's death, she also secures his martyrdom. For it is only through Salomé's public affirmation of Jean's prophetic status that the people and the audience are convinced of Jean's sanctity. Jean's prophetic ambition is undeniable, whilst his actual identity, even to Phanael, remains ambiguous. And yet with her declaration "You are called God", Salomé promotes Jean to God-like status. Accompanied by arpeggiated harps, Salomé proclaims before Jean that "You are called God! For there is no man that could retain such serenity! You, whose

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<sup>149</sup> Salomé: "J'ai vécu de sa vie et mourrai de sa mort, Ah! laissez-moi partager son sort!" Jean's death has been called for but no judgement has been pronounced when Salomé preemptively announces his death.

whole life has been but a prayer to love and charity!"<sup>150</sup> [Example 11.] As Salomé embraces death, the music builds into an orchestral and choral tutti. This sensual, musical idyll is based on the arpeggiated harp-accompanied theme, representing Salomé's imagined immortality with Jean, whilst the onlookers remain mystified by her devotion and proposed suicide. Indeed, they have good reason to be so, given that Salomé presents a different facet to Jean's character, a Jean whom neither the people, nor the audience, ever see: a sincere Jean who preaches love and charity. It is only after Salomé's eulogy that Jean, "inspired", plays the part of contemptuous martyr, condemning Rome. He is, therefore, not necessarily inspired by God, but by Salomé's faith in him. As for his "charity", this is the first time that the word is uttered in connection with him (it is never emitted by Jean himself), while his generally defensive and angry stance throughout the opera regarding his dogma has little to do with Christian charity as such.

### Example 11

The musical score for Example 11 consists of two systems. The first system is marked "Al<sup>o</sup> mod<sup>o</sup> sostenuto" with a tempo of quarter note = 88 (♩ = 88) and is for the character Jean. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "C'est Dieu que l'on te nomme... C'est Dieu que l'on te". The piano accompaniment features a harp with a "p sostenuto" dynamic and includes parts for horns and bassoons. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "nomme... Car il n'est pas un homme qui garde ta sérénité..." and continues the piano accompaniment.

<sup>150</sup> Salomé: "C'est Dieu que l'on te nomme, car il n'est pas un homme qui garde ta sérénité! Toi, dont la vie entière ne fut qu'une prière à l'amour, à la charité!"

As Jean is sentenced to death, he publically condemns Rome and its persecution of him. But as the critic Johannes Weber noted, "Jean curses Rome in the same terms as Christ prophesies Jerusalem's ruin. Jean is doubly wrong, first because his prediction is not realised and second because it is not Vitellius but Hérode and the priests who have condemned him."<sup>151</sup> Jean's outburst is in direct contrast to other portrayals of John the Baptist when faced with death. Despite his grand and violent rhetoric, Flaubert's Iakobann knows humility and the part he plays in the larger plan of destiny: "So that He may rise, I must fall!"<sup>152</sup> As death is announced for Iakobann by the coming of the executioner, Flaubert allows him no last words; they are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>153</sup> Milliet and Grémont's portrait of Jean and his ultimate condemnation of Rome, on the other hand, adopts the brutal rhetoric for which John the Baptist is famous. They are, however, the empty words of a man before death. Jean also blames the people for ignoring his message of love, best known to Salomé, before the final chorus in this scene is accompanied, once more, by his one ecstatic and mystically erotic theme [see Example 4] sounded three times by the horns. It seems an unfair plaint: the people did not ignore his musical message; they could not understand it, and unlike Salomé, did not manage to transcend its ambiguity.

The Jean Salomé knows and the precursor Phanael suspects are rarely perceived by the people or the audience. They see rather a figure who resembles Christ and yet at the same time, one who remains distinct from and inferior to the Messiah. Whilst presenting political ideas at odds with France's republican regime, Jean also claims rights which would identify him with revolutionary and radical tendencies. These different facets to his character are complemented by a portrayal of the ambiguous relationship between Jean and Salomé which, in the Third-Republican context, allows an interpretation of Jean Baptiste as a corrupt and fallen religious man. At the same time, Jean's ideological ideas, close to those of contemporary Catholicism and out of step with modern secular philosophy, and his violent attacks on authority,

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<sup>151</sup> Weber: "Jean lance sa malédiction contre Rome dans les mêmes termes dans lesquels le Christ prophétise la ruine de Jérusalem. Jean a doublement tort, d'abord parce que sa prédiction ne s'est pas réalisée, ensuite parce que ce n'est pas Vitellius mais Hérode et les prêtres qui l'ont condamné."

<sup>152</sup> Flaubert, 103 & 145.

<sup>153</sup> Oscar Wilde's and Richard Strauss's *Jokanaan*, too, is silent at his execution: Salome waiting for his last cry hears nothing but the noise of something falling to the ground, which she mistakes for the executioner's sword.

mean that Jean can be perceived as a Catholic representative of the embittered conflict between the Church and the anticlerical secular state at the end of the nineteenth century in France.

### In Conclusion

Jules Michelet's texts on priests, women and the family, as well as his history of the French Revolution were written thirty years before the première of *Hérodiade*. However, their editions and influence continued well into the Third Republic, by which time, Michelet's anticlerical view of the clergy and his opinions on women had been absorbed by the public imagination, becoming an axiom of (Third) republican thinking. Michelet's view of women as emancipated revolutionaries or clerical counter-revolutionaries can be seen to be explored in *Hérodiade*. Salomé cuts a Magdalen-like figure who manages to transcend earthly passion. Through the sublimation of her sexual identity, Salomé resembles Michelet's Mary; she is a Christian woman, devoted to her 'confessor' and willing to defend him and his cause (whatever that may be) in the face of civic republican authority. *Hérodiade*, on the other hand, is a sexually and politically emancipated woman; she resembles the 'sans culottes' who took the Marianne symbol literally as incitement to political activism. In doing so, however, due to her intellectual incapacity (as a woman), her female irrationality and her claim to male individuality, she is a threat to established authority and to the notions of female decorum and behaviour which were largely confined to the private sphere of the home. Indeed, in a regime obsessed with reforming and reinforcing woman's role as a mother and educator of her children, she is classed as an anti-woman due to her neglect of her familial duties. In this respect, the opera's portrayal of both mother and daughter remain conventional and in line with Third-Republican moral philosophy and policy.

However, the conventionality of this portrayal also serves to highlight the comparative decadence of Flaubert's *Hérodias*, which is nevertheless indirectly reflected in the opera. Flaubert's novel and Gustave Moreau's paintings can be viewed as the forerunners of the decadent Salomé topos of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century which produced,

most notably, Oscar Wilde's and Richard Strauss's versions of the biblical story.<sup>154</sup> Authors who spearheaded the decadent literary movement at the start of the 1880s, including Louis Ménard and Paul Bourget, were attracted to the philosophical and theological syncretism of transitional periods of history, those which presented eclectic cultural mixes. Thus the historical and oriental setting of the story of Salomé and John the Baptist provided a perfect backcloth on which to embroider a story of biblical decadence, Christian mysticism and female sexuality. In comparison to decadent literature's interpretation of the Salomé story, *Hérodiade's* portrayals of Jean Baptiste—as a fallen cleric—and Salomé—as a devout woman who falls in love with the prophet—are therefore more conventional in conception. However, due to the romantic twist of the story, which would be inconceivable in a truly decadent retelling of the story of Salomé the 'man-eater', the opera nevertheless results from and contributes to the nascent decadent movement.

In *Hérodiade*, it is Christianity and, by extension, Catholicism that is viewed as decadent, due to Jean Baptiste's sensuality and corruption – in short, his effeminacy. Jean's reactionary and protectionist stance through the opera, along with the portrayal of his fall where his intellectual reason is dominated by his all too human feelings, mark him out as an irrational, feminised element in the opera, comparable to what was perceived as feminised, nineteenth-century Catholicism with its cultivation of popular, ritualised and sensually mystical forms of devotion. These notions were more often and more explicitly addressed by the press in the reviews of the opera dating from the work's Parisian and Lyonnais premières of 1884 and 1885, rather than following the opera's 1881 Brussels première, when the issue of decadence in wider society was only just beginning to be popularised.<sup>155</sup> Théophile Gautier had suggested that the orientalising of the 'western' religion in art was a dangerous step. His definition of oriental, therefore, seems to have contained the associated notion of the erotic which was 'naturally' perceived as linked to immoral female sexuality. If religion was admitted as the source of the fundamental principles and morals which governed human existence, its orientalising, its eroticising and its

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<sup>154</sup> Along with Joris Karl Huysmans's descriptions of Moreau's paintings in his 1884 novel *A Rebours* and Gustav Klimt's *Judith*, these decadent versions of the tale are surveyed in Lawrence Kramer's article, 'Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3, 1990, 269-94.



feminisation could only be conceived as a threat to patriarchal society, be it Catholic or republican. *Hérodiade* preceded the full-blown decadent movement and was not ground-breaking in respect to the artistic trend. Yet all the while it began to deal with the issue of the Church's decadence through its anticlerical characterisation of Jean Baptiste. The opera's softening of the character of Hérodidade perversely served also to highlight the idea of sexual degeneration also. The exploration of true, fin-de-siècle notions of social decadence were left, however, to the characterisation of Hérode and the elaboration and reception of Massenet's later opera *Thaïs*.

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<sup>155</sup> See, in particular, the reviews by Henri Heugel, Massenet's future publisher, written under his pseudonym Moreno.

## Chapter Three

### *Dreams of Decadence, or the Death of Positivism*

From the 1860s onwards, contemporary French society began to be deemed degenerate by artists, doctors and politicians alike. A new elite sought an escape route from the real world, from positivist society which had ennobled scientific advance to an unprecedented degree and which seemed to cast in bronze the palpable truths of the universe and to ignore and condemn any sense of mysticism or spirituality. Positivist philosophers' hostility to the mysterious and the unanswerable thus brought about a split at certain levels of French intellectual society between those who adhered to the ideals of scientific reason and realism and those who allowed the admission of an unknowable dimension to human existence. The two strands were, however, united in medical research which, based on scientific principles, increasingly tried to deal with the human psyche and its malfunctions.

This chapter attempts to deal with the issue of decadence, as both an artistic movement and a social ill. The reciprocity of these two strands will be explored, as well as their influence on and implications for the cultural fabric of the last decade of the nineteenth century in France. In this context, the social and medical fascination for the dream world and the workings of the human unconscious, and, moreover, their links to the erotic imagination, sexual perversion, onanism and their perceived contribution to the degeneration of society at large, will be examined. This discussion will be related to the representation of the operatic characters Hérode and Athanaël (*Thaïs*), both of which focus on erotic dreams and thus the characters' corruption as decadent elements within society. From the discussion of Athanaël's visions develops an analysis of the social climate in which *Thaïs* was première, demonstrating how all elements of the opera—its formal structure, the ballet, Massenet's music, even Gallet's libretto—were perceived as degenerate. The critical reception of *Thaïs*, whether of the sensational scenes which displayed the female body, or of the literary and musical fabric of the opera, betrays an obsession with decadence.

## Artistic Decadence and Social Degeneration

Artistic action breaking with positivism came in the form of the decadent literary movement. The notion of society as degenerate and the desire to seek refuge from the outside world in one's own unconscious had been present in French literature from the 1820s onwards in the works of Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas père, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many of these authors had experimented with drugs, particularly the exotic hashish and opium, in a quest for new creative experiences.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the effects of hallucinatory drugs had been well publicised from the 1820s onwards following Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* which quickly became a cult text. De Quincey explained that when opium was taken in moderate quantities, it at first, provoked ecstatic dreams or transfigured feelings from real life. Gradually, however, these delights changed to torture, and the conscious of the dreamer became besieged by increasingly tyrannical and terrifying hallucinatory visions.<sup>3</sup> The above-mentioned writers were also among those who spearheaded the orientalist movement in the arts. Indeed, the use of hashish, commonly smoked in the Near and Middle East, to transport artists to a little-known region (of the unconscious) may be viewed as equivalent to their exploration of the Orient which was also perceived as 'otherworldly', as a refuge from materialistic Western society, as a "backward but vital" haven which, in its primitiveness, had retained that which industrialised Europe had lost.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1880s however, decadent literature had become a

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<sup>1</sup> Eugen Weber, *Fin de siècle: La France à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, trans. Philippe Delamore (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 26; Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 16. (The former monograph is a translation of the latter, but with certain amendments and supplementary material. Hereafter, I shall refer to the French translation as Weber, vf., and to the original as Weber, vo.) Weber attributes decadent characteristics in literature to the typical French education during the nineteenth century, based on Greek and Latin classics which abound with scenes of debauchery and decline, and notes the abundance of new translations of these classics that appeared during the 1830s and 1840s.

<sup>2</sup> On artists' drug-taking, see Gautier *La pipe d'opium* or *Le Club des Hachichins* (first published in *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1 February 1846). The *Club*, first planned as a medical experiment by Dr. Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, included Nerval, Gautier, Balzac, Delacroix and Daumier who took hashish in strong enough doses to provoke hallucination which was recorded by the doctor and the artists themselves. Baudelaire wrote *Les Paradis artificiels*, but attended the *Club* only a few times; he nevertheless consumed large quantities of the opium tincture laudanum throughout his life on medical grounds.

<sup>3</sup> See Jean Pierrot, *Le Rêve*, Univers de Lettres Bordas, Recueil thématique (Paris: Bordas, 1985), 73. (First published in 1972.) The literary inspiration of the scenario of Berlioz's programmatic *Symphonie Fantastique* was influenced by de Quincey's monograph: the artist hero has nightmarish visions of his own execution which are followed by a Faustian witches' sabbat.

<sup>4</sup> See Ralph P. Locke, *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 172. In his article, 'Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless

definite literary current and style, containing a lexicon of themes and images.<sup>5</sup> Founded by Anatole Baju in April 1886, the monthly magazine *Le Décadent* outlined the decadent aesthetic:

Society disintegrates under the corrosive action of a decaying civilisation. Refinement of appetite, of feelings, of taste, of luxury, of pleasures; neurosis, hysteria, hypnotism, morphinomania, charlatanism, extreme Schopenhauerism, these are the premonitory symptoms of social evolution.<sup>6</sup>

In the journal's first issue, Baudelaire was revered as the father of the decadent movement, and decadent writers declared that their mission was not to inaugurate new things but only to destroy and unseat old-fashioned ones.<sup>7</sup>

Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A rebours* (1884), became the epitome of decadent writing and the story's hero, Des Esseintes, the ultimate literary expression of the degeneration of wider society. Des Esseintes is the last member of a dying aristocratic 'race' (i.e. family) who rejects the outside world and society, shutting himself up in a luxuriously furnished room of his house, an artificial, interior space; all his emotional and physical pleasure is derived from the creations and recreation of his own mind.<sup>8</sup> Des Esseintes thus displayed a predominant characteristic of decadent literary *névrose*: the flight from the real world to a refuge of contained physical and mental spaces.<sup>9</sup> Both these spheres, however, can be defined as

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Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East', *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* XXII/1 (1998), 20-53, Locke mentions Gustave Flaubert's opinion that the Middle East provided an escape from corrupt urban Europe (23).

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, 'Introduction', *Romantisme – Décadence*, 42, 1983, 3-8, at 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Le Décadent*, 1, 10 April 1886, cited in Jean-François Six, *1886 : Naissance du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 135: "La société se désagrège sous l'action corrosive d'une civilisation délétère. Affinement d'appétits, de sensations, de goût, de luxe, de jouissances; névrose, hystérie, hypnotisme, morphinomanie, charlatanisme, schopenhauerisme à outrance, tels sont les prodromes de l'évolution sociale." This leading article by Baju was followed in August by an article entitled 'Les Poètes décadents' in *Le Temps* by Paul Bourde in which Verlaine and Mallarmé were named as pillars of the decadent group. Bourde's article provoked Moréas, in *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, to reject the label of 'decadent' and to create that of 'symbolist'. The same writers (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Banville) were shown to be on a quest for the pure concept of the eternal symbol and for a renewal of verse. The following month, Moréas concretised the 'symbolist manifesto' in the literary supplement of *Le Temps* (18 September 1886), suggesting that reality was better understood by intuition and better expressed by illusion. See Six, 143-5; Weber, *vf.*, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Six, 135-7.

<sup>8</sup> Six, 142.

<sup>9</sup> See Silverman (*Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 17-39) regarding the Goncourt brothers and the interior decoration of their home. See also Séverine Jouve, *Obsessions et perversions dans la littérature et les demeures à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle*, Collection Savoir: Lettres, (Paris: Hermann, Editeurs des sciences et des arts, 1996). This need for 'escape' from fin-de-siècle society was also superbly illustrated by the (real life) Paul Claudel's reaction on discovering Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*. In 1886, the young writer, later diplomat, and younger brother of sculptor Camille

feminised. Enlightenment thinking on the dreamworld formed the basis of positivist understanding of dreams. A voice of reason, identified as male, was seen to regulate the awakened conscious, and personal (and political) order depended on the interiorisation of this reason and discipline. During sleep, however, this discipline was seen to be suppressed, and dreams were viewed as anarchical, as an attack on reason, order and truth. Voltaire's explanations thus led to the binary oppositions of day and night, order and chaos, reason and passion, discipline and desire, active and passive, to which Diderot's writings added man and woman.<sup>10</sup> Dreams and the workings of the unconscious were thus seen as a corrupting, feminine and decadent influence on male reason. In his dreams, man rejected his individualism—his intrinsic status within society—and embraced a female-gendered irrationality. Hence, one's own unconscious was considered as the realm which defied virile reason, and the home was viewed as the natural territory of women. Thus decadent male artists could be seen not only to reject their duty to use their intelligence in society, in favour of a voiceless, emotional, feminised irrationality, but also to retreat physically from the male sphere of society into the feminised domain of the home.<sup>11</sup> As men reneged on the moral and philosophical principles on which French society had been based since the Revolution, so society was viewed as decadent, and the notions of effeminacy and decadence became intertwined. Indeed, at the same time, women were beginning to break out of their traditionally defined sphere of activity via the government's new legislation on education, divorce etc. It seems, therefore, as if it was not only industrial society's modernity which provoked male artists to withdraw, but also women's growing participation in creating a modern society where the boundaries between the roles defined for men and women were no longer as clear as they once had been.

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Claudé wrote: "I at last left the hideous world of Taine, Renan and other nineteenth-century gods, left that labour camp, left that terrible mechanism entirely governed by truly inflexible laws, knowable and instructible to boot. (Robots have always made me feel a sort of hysterical fear.) The supernatural was revealed to me." Cited in Six (155), drawn from P. A. Lesort, *Claudé par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), 24: "Je sortais enfin de ce monde hideux de Taine, de Renan et des autres Moloch du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, de ce baigne, de cette affreuse mécanique entièrement gouvernée par des lois parfaitement inflexibles et pour comble d'horreur connaissables et enseignables. (Les automates m'ont toujours inspiré une espèce d'horreur hystérique.) J'avais la révélation du surnaturel."

<sup>10</sup> Joan W. Scott, *La Citoyenne paradoxale: Les féministes françaises et les droits de l'homme*, trans. Marie Bourdé and Colette Pratt (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 48. Originally published as *Only Paradoxes to Offer* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996). Scott's views are based on her reading of Voltaire's definition of 'Songe' in *L'Encyclopédie* (15, 356) and Diderot's *Sur les femmes*.

Decadence in artistic circles was interpreted in wider society, leading to diagnoses of degeneration throughout the social spectrum. After Hegelian philosophy and Darwinian theory, history and progress from the mid-nineteenth century onwards were invariably viewed in linear terms, as an advance from a primitive to a sophisticated state, each generation presenting a refinement of its predecessor.<sup>12</sup> But as France increased its industrial, economic and colonial power, these notions of progress were seen as finite, and the prevailing view of progress as evolutionary necessarily implied the notion of decline. In his *Psychopathia Sexualis* of 1888, Richard von Krafft-Ebing likened modern society to humanity, highlighting the potential for decay within its systems.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, by the mid 1880s, modernisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and democratisation, borne on the wave of positivism and scientific advance, were seen to have become part of society's degeneracy. The term 'degeneracy' was indebted to the anthropological tradition of modern psychiatry in France which defined degeneracy as the cause of neurasthenia. Neurasthenia, seen as the direct result of the frenetic pace of modern, industrialised city life, was understood by Jean-Martin Charcot as an atrophy of the nervous system, a mental hypersensitivity and physical disability resulting from continuous mental effort without break for physical activity.<sup>14</sup> Charcot dedicated himself to research into nervous disorders at the Salpêtrière hospital from 1862 onwards, and during the 1880s, he experimented with hypnotism in an effort to 'heal' urban society of its degenerate members, to find a 'cure' for the fin-de-siècle malady of hysteria, to rescue society from its decadent downfall.<sup>15</sup> By inducing hallucination, Charcot encouraged his patients to externalise their dreams and fantasies, using

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<sup>11</sup> In *De la justice* (3, 378) of 1858, Proudhon had already diagnosed a feminisation within the arts and dubbed it decadent. He believed that a female influence could be discerned in literature via what he termed as excessive and effusive loquacity, a lack of ideas and moral sense, and a negation of style.

<sup>12</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 213; Jann Pasler, 'Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Late Romantic Era, Man & Music Series* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 389-416, at 389-95.

<sup>13</sup> Gilman, 197-8.

<sup>14</sup> Silverman, 79-80. Charcot's American colleague, George Miller Beard wrote in 1881: "The chief and primary cause of this [...] very rapid increase of nervousness is modern civilization, which is distinguished from ancient by these five characteristics: steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women." George Miller Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York, 1881), vi-vii, cited in Gilman, 202. Beard thus seems to affirm that women who did not conform to the gender role assigned to them contributed to not only their own degeneracy but also to that of the nation as a whole.

suggestion to observe, diagnose and treat them. Charcot was far from alone in this field, yet his high-profile research and Tuesday 'séances' at the Salpêtrière, during which he paraded his hysterics and which became a fashionable society outing, liberally covered by the popular press, made him the focal point of public perception of nervous disorders and physiological degeneracy.<sup>16</sup> Thus, whilst trying to cure society of its degeneracy, medical science greatly contributed to and compounded the notion of social decadence in France.

For artistic society, which widely disseminated Charcot's ideas from the 1860s onwards, the association of degeneracy, disability and the imagination led to a certain revival of the 'Romantic genius' ideal, particularly by the Goncourt brothers who believed the neurasthenic state to be the foundation of modern art.<sup>17</sup> The roots of this idea, developed in the positivist Charcot's research, can be found in the work of the Swiss doctor Samuel Auguste Tissot, whose 1766 monograph *Sur la santé des hommes de lettres* diagnosed debilitating exhaustion as a result of the creative mental effort demanded by the act of creative writing. From the start of the eighteenth century, dictionaries had defined imagination as the capacity to be able to represent exterior objects in the mind as images or concepts. The faculty to create objects in the mind, however, was more often viewed as a degenerate form of the reflexive imagination. In *L'Encyclopédie*, Voltaire confirmed this idea by affirming that creative art could lead to madness. Writers tended to identify themselves with the characters they created; this kind of imagination carried a person beyond themselves into a state of ecstasy or exaltation defined as a false identification, a confusion of oneself and the 'other'.<sup>18</sup> As in Voltaire's definition of dreams, the artist ventures into an anarchical and feminised realm of his imagination/unconscious in order to create a dangerous identification of the 'male' self. Once again, Voltaire's definition seems to equate the unconscious realm and the female, this time adding the notion of

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<sup>15</sup> Gérard Peylet, *La littérature fin de siècle de 1884 à 1898. Entre décadentisme et modernité*, Série Thématique Lettres (Paris: Vuibert, 1994), 145.

<sup>16</sup> The contemporaneous theories of the Nancy-based physician Hippolyte Bernheim went further than those of Charcot, maintaining that everyone, not just hysterics, possessed the capacity for hypnosis and suggestion (regarded as a manifestation of hysteria by Charcot). Thus, in his 1884 treatise, *De la suggestion dans l'état hypnotique et dans l'état de veille*, Bernheim proclaimed the dissolution of the borders between internal and external reality, the subjective and the objective, thus affirming with scientific authority that which was reiterated just two years later by the symbolist manifesto. See Silverman, 78-88.

<sup>17</sup> Silverman, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, 47, based on 'Imagination', *L'Encyclopédie* 8, 561-2.

the ecstasy procured by excursions into one's own unconscious. Voltaire's regulatory powers of (male) reason, therefore, are called into play to correct the potential dangers of an active imagination, for Voltaire believed the borders between fiction and reality, madness and health, order and disorder in the human brain to require constant surveillance and discipline by his internalised voice of reason.

Tissot and his friend and correspondent Jean Jacques Rousseau were of a similar opinion that the imagination was a Pandora's box, the exploration of which could lead to the contamination of Reason.<sup>19</sup> As the imagination was dangerous to reason—allowing disorderly, false and effeminate thoughts to corrupt it—so pollution could attack that other cherished principle of the Enlightenment, Nature, and Tissot dedicated a large part of his research to onanism. His 1760 treatise *L'onanisme, ou dissertation physique sur les maladies produites par la masturbation* legitimated the medical treatment of onanism and diagnosed its symptoms and results in individuals which included feeble growth, wasted bodies, impotence, sterility, madness and even death.<sup>20</sup> The blight of the erotic imagination, and in particular onanism, were therefore considered to be the result of civilisation's (i.e. increasingly urbanised and industrialised society's) pollution of Nature, thus linking, a century before Charcot, the evolution of modern society to physical, mental and sexual degeneration.<sup>21</sup> Tissot also associated the physical fatigue of onanists with that of authors; the line between genius and decadence was a thin one. This association was then reiterated by doctors and writers throughout the nineteenth century who warned against overworking both the literary and erotic imagination which could cause 'molleses', i.e. any feminised behaviour. Thus the imagination and deviant, effeminate sexual behaviour were intimately linked: the *Encyclopédie* defined onanism as a 'dérèglement de l'imagination'; Fournier and Béguin's 1819 medical dictionary affirmed that an individual's overactive imagination caused hypersexuality.<sup>22</sup> Thus during the course

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<sup>19</sup> Vernon A. Rosario, *L'Irrésistible ascension du pervers : entre littérature et psychiatrie*, trans. Guy Le Gaufey (Paris: Epel, 2000), 43, 52. Originally published as *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), although I have only read, and possess, this monograph in its French translation, to which version all footnote citations refer.

<sup>20</sup> Rosario, 21-6.

<sup>21</sup> Tissot's thought is developed in two other monographs: *Avis au peuple sur sa santé* (1761) and *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde* (1770). See Rosario, 27-8. Rosario also cites (32) from the article 'Masturbation' of Fournier's and Béguin's *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1819), 31, 100-35, where it is affirmed that the illnesses stemming from onanism are more frequent as modern society becomes more civilised.

<sup>22</sup> Rosario, 34, 38.



of the nineteenth century, Voltaire's idea of ecstasy procured by a vivid imagination was invariably interpreted as sexual by a world increasingly occupied by the erotic imagination.<sup>23</sup>

Following the Revolution, a new generation of hygienists believed that individual bodily and mental health was linked to that of the social body. Deviant members of society, whether madmen (or women), onanists or decadent artists were thus no longer seen as unfortunate and innocent victims of a corrupt civilisation but rather as dangerous, or even criminal, social polluters. 'Auto-pollution' in particular was no longer mere auto-destruction but social spoliation:<sup>24</sup>

Masturbation is one of those plagues which silently attacks and destroys humanity. [...] in my opinion, neither plague, nor war, nor smallpox, nor a whole host of similar illnesses have more disastrous results for humanity than this fatal habit. It is the destructive factor in civilised societies.

[Masturbation is] the powerful cause of depopulation [...] which] aims to corrupt, to bestialise, to degrade and to deteriorate the species.<sup>25</sup>

Nineteenth-century literature against the practice of onanism constantly reinforced the notion of deviant individuals who polluted the purity and life force of the social body. Its attention was thus fixed upon young people who represented the continuity of a vital nation, and during the second half of the century, a massive war was waged against onanism in children, adolescents and young adults. The danger of masturbation was one of the prime obsessions of parents and school teachers whose efforts to extirpate it were so enormous that they have been likened to a modern version of medieval witchhunts. Self-control, ideally until the age of twenty five, was preached by both teachers and priests alike, for young debauchees were thought to produce feeble children who would be ruined for life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rosario, 17-8.

<sup>24</sup> Rosario, 49-51. Rosario explains (20) that the term 'pollution', used in Catholic theology from the Middle Ages, is defined in the *Encyclopédie* as the ejaculation of sperm outside of procreation.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Henri Réveillé-Parise, *Traité d'hygiène appliqué à l'éducation de la jeunesse*, 1828, cited in Rosario (50): "La masturbation est un de ces fléaux qui attaquent et détruisent sourdement l'humanité. [...] à mon avis, ni la peste, ni la guerre, ni la variole, ni une foule de maux semblables, n'ont des résultats plus désastreux pour l'humanité que cette fatale habitude. C'est l'élément destructeur des sociétés civilisées." Dr. Debouge, 'De la manustupratiomanie', *Journal de médecine, de chirurgie et de pharmacologie*, 10/15, 1852, 314: "[La manustupration est] la cause puissante de dépopulation [...] qui] tend à corrompre, à bestialiser, à dégrader et à dégénérer l'espèce."

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945*, Volume One "Ambition, Love and Politics", (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 306.

In Flaubert's *Hérodias*, the Antipas couple's degeneracy can be largely attributed to Hérodias; she is the reason behind Hérode's impotence. However, in the opera *Hérodiade*, Hérode himself becomes the focus of decadent issues, Hérodiade's character, as discussed in chapter two, being softened and more traditionally feminine than Flaubert's *femme fatale*. Thus the opera works through the issues relating to decadence and degeneracy in relation to Hérode, particularly at the beginning of Act II when he takes a love potion to procur a hallucinatory, ecstatic dream experience which can be interpreted as erotic and onanistic. Such notions are, nevertheless, developed much further in Massenet's later opera *Thaïs*. Hérode's vision scene is transformed there for the Father of the Christian Church, Athanaël, who, as a result of his ascetic repression of his own sensuality and sexuality (rather than through the use of any exterior stimulant), dreams of erotically luring women, whether human or mythical. Indeed, the decadent and symbolist aesthetics in *Thaïs* are not only apparent in the opera's subject material but also in its formal structure. The notion that the workings of the unconscious could be translated into images without conscious or linguistic mediation formed the creative impulse behind certain symbolist artistic products, and is explored in the opera through the inclusion of mimed vision scenes, dramatic ballet and orchestral interludes. *Thaïs* was premièreed thirteen years after *Hérodiade*, and the intervening decade had seen the large-scale emergence and development of the Darwin-influenced, anti-positivist notion of degeneration. It was not only the opera itself which reflected the changing face of social debate but also the opera's reception, for the press criticism following the première of *Thaïs* often set out to demonstrate the degeneracy of the opera and its authors.

### Hérode as Figure of Decadence

The moral and physical decadence of the erotic imagination, and particularly onanism, were important factors in the diagnosis of society as degenerate. These issues can be seen to form a central part of the 'message' contained in *Hérodiade* through its portrayal of Hérode. Hérode has a drug-induced dream—a "Vision fugitive"—during which he imagines the consummation of his desired carnal relationship with Salomé. Like nineteenth-century artists, he takes a hallucinatory substance in order to flee reality and to take refuge in his unconscious, which provides him with an ecstatic experience that can only be interpreted as sexual. The original staging book indeed confirms that during this scene, Hérode is "under the influence of a kind of *hashish* which turns him into a sort of visionary, an ecstatic", culminating in a paroxysm of ecstasy as he believes he possesses Salomé.<sup>27</sup> Via his use of narcotics, Hérode allows his reason to be invaded by irrational images and passions: his mind is not only obsessed by a woman but it is also feminised. Indeed, for a large part of Hérode's scene, he is surrounded by nubile slave girls and dancers, and it is the Babylonian girl who offers him the love potion: Hérode's realm, his chamber is a feminised space in which his reason is contaminated.

Although stripped of Salomé's dance of the seven veils, the opera recreates Hérode's ecstatic voyeurism of the nubile dancer in the showpiece aria "Vision fugitive" which uses similar imagery to Flaubert's account of Salomé's dance [see over].

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<sup>27</sup> Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, H6 (I), 19-25.

## Flaubert

Ses attitudes exprimaient des soupirs et toute sa personne une telle langueur [...] Le Tétrarque se perdait dans un rêve [...] La vision s'éloigna. Ce n'était pas une vision. [...]

Puis, ce fut l'emportement de l'amour qui veut être assouvi. [...] de ses vêtements jaillissaient d'invisibles étincelles qui enflammaient les hommes.[...] tous, dilatant leurs narines, palpitaient de convoitise. [...]

d'une voix que des sanglots de volupté entrecoupaient, il lui disait: – « Viens! viens! » [...]

Mais le Tétrarque criait plus fort: «Viens! viens! Tu auras Capharnaüm! la plaine de Tibérias! mes citadelles! la moitié de mon royaume! »

## Milliet & Grémont

Ah! ne t'en fuis pas... douce illusion!  
Vision fugitive et toujours poursuivie,  
Ange mystérieux qui prend toute ma vie,  
[...] Mes yeux sont obscurcis... mais je la vois... c'est elle...

Puis mourir enlacés, dans une même ivresse!  
Pour ces transports  
Pour cette flamme,

Que de cris sur ma lèvre... et je ne puis parler... Je sens là dans mon coeur qui s'agite et soupire Comme un aveu brûlant qui ne peut s'exhaler... [...]  
Viens plus près, [...] Viens qu'à tes pieds je meure [...] Ah! sans remords et sans plainte Je donnerais mon âme pour toi,<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Gustave Flaubert, 'Hérodias', *Trois Contes* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1983), 140-2.

### Flaubert

Her bearing expressed sighs and her whole being, such languidness [...] The Tetrarch was lost in a dream [...] The vision grew distant. It was not a vision. [...]

Then, love that wants to be satisfied was swept along. [...] from her clothes flashed invisible sparks that inflamed the men. [...] all, their nostrils dilated, quivered with desire. [...]

With a voice broken by sobs of voluptuousness, he said: "Come! come!" [...]  
But the Tetrarch cried louder: "Come! come! you will have Capharnaüm! The plain of Tiberias! my citadels! half my kingdom!"

### Milliet & Grémont

Ah! do not flee... sweet illusion!  
Fleeting vision which still I pursue,  
Mysterious angel who takes over my life,  
[...] My eyes grow dim... but I see her... it is she...

Then to die entwined of the same ecstasy!  
For such transports of delight  
For such passion,

What cries are on my lips... yet I cannot speak... I feel it there in my pounding, sighing heart like a burning vow that cannot be expressed... [...]  
Come closer, [...] Come so that I may die at your feet [...] Ah! without remorse or complaint I would give my soul for you

Hérode's words in the libretto "Mysterious angel who takes over my life" are confirmed in the star-gazing scene of the following act as Phanuel discloses that Salomé's and Hérodiade's stars resemble one twin soul, with the same life and brightness: "Vos étoiles sont comme une âme jumelle avec la même vie et la même clarté!". Indeed, the girl in Hérode's vision does pervade his being for she is a younger version of his wife Hérodiade, and with this 'time-travelling' trick the two women do take over his whole life. This image is also echoed in Flaubert's text (140): "Sur le haut de l'estrade, elle retira son voile. C'était Hérodias, comme autrefois dans sa jeunesse." ["At the top of the dais, she removed her veil. It was Herodias, as once before in her youth."]

In Flaubert's novel, Salomé's dance is, in fact, the creation of Salomé and her mother together.

She [Hérodiad] had had instructed, far from Machaerous, Salomé her daughter, who would be pleasing to the Tetrarch; and the idea was a good one. She was sure of that now!<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Milliet and Grémont's Hérodiade wants to use Salomé purely as a comfort for her own sorrows, Flaubert's Hérodiad delights in manipulating her own daughter and placing her in Hérode's path. Flaubert's Salomé reinforces this sense of female authority, for during the dance scene, whilst remaining the object of the patriarchal male gaze, she manages to usurp control of it and subjugates the eyes that subjugate her.<sup>30</sup> Flaubert's Salomé has real power and so can cut short Hérode's erotic fantasies and craved *jouissance* ("Then love that wants to be satisfied was swept along") by asking for the head of John the Baptist. In the opera, however, 'Salomé's dance' (i.e. the "Vision fugitive") is created for Hérode by Hérode, and the audience participates only through his eyes: the opera's Salomé retains dignity and victim status, since she is here only a vision, and one that can be manipulated by Hérode to achieve the desired consummation. Thus the power appropriated by Salomé via her subjugation of the male gaze in Flaubert's tale is restored to the operatic Hérode, and Salomé's eroticism is projected onto Hérode in a show-stopping aria.<sup>31</sup> The opera's Hérode can, therefore, achieve the climax which Flaubert's Hérode can only desire: he cries

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<sup>29</sup> Flaubert, 141: "Elle [Hérodiad] avait fait instruire, loin de Machaerous, Salomé sa fille, que le Tétrarque aimerait; et l'idée était bonne. Elle en était sûre maintenant!"

<sup>30</sup> See Lawrence Kramer, 'Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3, 1990, 269-94, at 272-4.

<sup>31</sup> Hérode's affection for Salomé in the opera supersedes the pure lustful *convoitise* of Flaubert's Hérode. Despite Hérode's frustration, his love for Salomé seems sincere and paternalistic. When he finally confronts the real-life Salomé in Act III, scene 10, Hérode's love is reassuring and alluring; his torment and vision of future joy and happiness are straightforward and without pretension, if somewhat over-optimistic. This scene also recalls Hérode's charming Act I supplication of Salomé, which lacks the overtly sexual overtones of "Vision fugitive". Hérode's musical language is one of love: his almost adolescent enthusiasm and longing are portrayed by seductive ninth chords, scurrying violin semiquavers and 'pure' C major. Added to this musical freshness, is a tender, cello solo-accompanied melody, diminished-seventh chords to depict Hérode's anguish and, again, the key of C major, used to underpin Hérode's idyllic vision of life with Salomé. However, as Hérode's cajoling pleas are continually rejected, he threatens Salomé and tries to force himself upon her. It is at this point that his 'pure' C major pleas turn to threatening diminished seventh chords based on C#. Hérode's last stand to convince Salomé to be his then recalls the main musical motive from his "Vision fugitive" just as it looks more and more likely that his vision is to remain just that. Indeed, this idealistic vision furiously dissolves in a chromatically agonised tutti descending passage in 'tainted' C minor. But right at the end of the opera, and in spite of his condemnation of both Salomé and her 'lover', Hérode is completely moved by Salomé's pleas for Jean's life where she reveals her own unhappy parental story. Hérode wishes to be her comforter, lover and surrogate father all in one (ironically, he unknowingly already fills the last criterion), but only manages to enfold Salomé in his arms as she falls dead.

“Then to die entwined, [...] Come so that I may die at your feet”), followed by the stage direction of “Overcome, he falls on to the bed.”<sup>32</sup>

However, whilst Flaubert’s *Salomé* exhibits herself publicly, the dance which Hérode imagines in his aria “*Vision fugitive*” is for his eyes only. The mass voyeurism of Flaubert’s account is replaced by the more sinister and lone voyeurism of Hérode’s drugged and vivid imagination, and *Salomé*’s dance excites only one man instead of a room full of them. But as this is, in fact, a “vision”, does Hérode not excite himself and could the connotations of Hérode’s solitary *jouissance* be not more abhorrent to a society obsessed by the plague of onanism than the decadent sensual orgy of Flaubert’s text? The libretto’s identification of Hérode with this practice paints not only a condemning portrait of the Tetrarch as a social polluter but also calls into question his virility and offers a reason for his sterility. Flaubert’s text unambiguously contains the notion that the Antipas couple are sterile: Hérode and Hérodiade have had no children in at least twelve years together.<sup>33</sup> It was argued in the last chapter that Hérodiade was indicated as the sterile partner due to her masculine tendencies and her social, political and emotional emancipation. Even the blame for Hérode’s general impotence, both physical and political, may be laid at Hérodiade’s door, for her masculinity has effectively emasculated her husband, leaving him no other scope for activity than the feminised realm of his imagination and his bed chamber, just like Huysmans’s *Des Esseintes*. And yet, by reading Hérode as an onanist, his own corruption and social crimes appear even greater and more threatening than those of Hérodiade, and Hérode’s sexual habits are identified as a symptom of not only his personal decline, but also of the degeneration of wider society through Hérode’s willing renunciation of his virility, his health and his power to procreate.

In Hérode’s aria “*Vision fugitive*”, Massenet musically supports the notions of frustrated machismo and carnal fantasy contained within the libretto. [The whole of this aria is given as Appendix 4.] He does so by introducing a repetitive melodic line that sets itself pitch limits only to vanquish those obstacles, and by the use of interrupted, unresolved and yet sometimes prolonged harmonic procedures. This

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<sup>32</sup> “Il tombe accablé sur le lit.”

<sup>33</sup> Flaubert, 105.

vision's imaginary and transient nature is musically translated by a general lack of root position chords and an abundance of dominant bass pedals notes—this vision is acoustically expectant, elusive and only tangible in an unresolved sense.<sup>34</sup> The use of the solo saxophone adds an alluring and enticing element to Hérode's imagined seduction. It is the saxophone that introduces the repetitive and rather introverted motive from which much of the melodic material for this scene is fashioned. [Example A, bars 1-6.] After handing this motive over to strings and to the vocal line, however, the saxophone tends to stay within the texture of the orchestra, but also highlights moving inner lines on weaker beats. It is precisely in this fashion, however, that the saxophone, with what Berlioz defined as its inherent dream-like and, therefore, ecstatic qualities, in conjunction with other wind instruments and particularly the clarinet, interspersed in the vocal line, serves to add a sensual undercurrent yet subtle impetus to Hérode's desire.<sup>35</sup>

The main body of the extended aria is divided into three sections: A: Hérode fantasises about Salomé (bars 1-46); B: Hérode drinks the love potion offered by a Babylonian slave girl (bars 47-71); A<sup>1</sup>: Hérode possesses Salomé in his dream (bars 72-96). As Hérode's excitement mounts for the first time in the A section of the aria, a repeated three-beat-long phrase is overlapped canonically at only two beats' distance at the words "Puis mourir enlacés". [Example B, bars 20-33.] This is followed by the reiteration of an E natural in the vocal line which is established as a brief temporary pitch ceiling later over diminished-seventh harmony based on E, which Hérode's fully activated machismo breaks through to an F and then to an ecstatic high Gb as he willingly offers his soul in return for Salomé.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A sense of expectancy inherent in the dominant note and dominant harmony is once again exploited in relation to Hérode's longing as it was for Salomé's expectancy of Jean's arrival and Phanuel's quest for Jean's identity.

<sup>35</sup> Whilst Berlioz describes the middle register of the clarinet as "virginal", Massenet allies the use of the clarinet with that of the saxophone in his musical portrayal of Jean's ambiguously sensual religious message at the end of Act I of *Hérodiade*. Thus the perceived character of this mixture of wind colours is already tainted by the interlinked ideas of religious mysticism and ecstatic/erotic transport.

<sup>36</sup> In her analysis of Don José's 'Flower song' from *Carmen*, Susan McClary also refers to the technique of pitch ceilings in the vocal line. Don José's aria, also in Db Major, presents other analogies with Hérode's "Vision fugitive" in that the final perfect cadence of the 'Flower song', the most reliable "illusion of cause and effect in tonal music", is harmonically disturbed and undermined by a series of woodwind chords below the held leading note in the vocal line. As the sometimes ungrounded and/or prolonged cadential procedures of Hérode's aria may be read as a signifier of the expectant intangibility of this dream and Hérode's protracted longing, so the final harmonic conclusion to Don José's aria, underpinning his words "Carmen, je t'aime", may be open to a similar

The dramatic thrust of the aria is not continuously at full tilt, however. The cadential procedures are sometimes almost masochistically prolonged and can be read as a protraction of Hérode's longing. At the end of the first section of the aria, before Hérode drinks the love potion, we expect a final resolution and Db major chord. [Example C, bars 36-43.] However, the harmony is prolonged, chord V moving to a German sixth chord, then to the tonic but still in second inversion. This in turn passes to chord IIb<sup>7</sup> with a chromatic root E, moving from the Eb of the previous dominant chord to the F of the final Db chord (in root position). Hérode's desire to spin out his pleasure is further underlined by the dramatically tense vocal line that, whilst based on Db, tries twice to move up to an Eb, causing disturbing yet delicious false-relation harmonic conflicts with the E naturals in both the German sixth and the chromatically altered IIb<sup>7</sup> chords.

It is only after Hérode has accepted the philtre which conjures up Salomé for him in the B section of the aria—her appearance in his imagination is supported by the melodic motif associated with Salomé the dancer—that Hérode's melodic line manages to break out of the repetitive and insular strictures of the motive highlighted in Example A (bar 1). [Example D, bars 68-77.] Now he sees her, things are much clearer and freer—the tonality sets off in G major and the vocal line, whilst still turning back on itself, has a much wider ambitus with chromatic phrases. However, the two-bar “Vision” phrase slips harmonically from G to Gb, and then to F. Hérode, in his flight, is chasing after a Salomé who is, in effect, moving away from him. The chromatically descending series of unresolved dominant seventh chords contained within this passage marks the real dramatic crisis of the aria: the dissipation of Hérode's hopes, expectant and yet unfulfilled, ‘visible’ and yet fleeting and intangible. The wind instruments' interjections of the “vision” motive, now melodically independent from the vocal line, encourage Hérode to interrupt this downward progression and try to impose an animated, almost frantic, yet harmonically and melodically static, build-up, where he pleads with his image of Salomé to yield to him. His frustration is intense and for the second time in the aria he sets up a temporary pitch ceiling for himself. [Example E, bars 78-88.]

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interpretation. See McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97-8.



The vocal line in this chromatically circular (both harmonically and melodically) animated section begins from C, and returns to it, before breaking out of the cycle and back to the bar-long phrase that earlier became truncated with Hérode's mounting impetuosity. The melody does not, however, break away from the C pitch ceiling immediately so that when it suddenly bursts to the high F, accompanied by an unforeseen huge tutti chord, it seems less well prepared and premature. In his hurry, Hérode also precipitates the arrival of the Gb (again accompanied by a fortissimo tutti chord), the vocal line omitting the descent from the F and quickly following it with the ascent to the climactic Gb. The quick succession of the contained accompanying tutti chords serves to underline the abruptness of the vocal line. The aria's use of pitch ceilings thus allows Hérode's need to conquer and dominate not only Salomé but also his own emotions to be addressed continually in the vocal line, which is a show of vocal bravura.

The libretto's idea of carnal fantasy is hence musically fulfilled by the many climactic moments in the suitably accompanied vocal line, always bigger and better (higher and louder) than those previous. The repetitiveness of these moments builds dramatic tension but the expected release is an unhappy one: as Hérode imagines himself drawing Salomé to his bed, crying "Come so that I may die at your feet", he falls into an uneasy, drugged sleep, musically illustrated by the immediate chromatic disturbance of the final resolution. Indeed, Hérode's expectation is a frustrated one; he dreams and imagines but is unable to materialise his goals for his gender and reason are seen to be effeminate and debilitated respectively. While the blasphemous portrayal of John the Baptist supposedly provoked clerical disapproval of the opera, the predominant atmosphere of this one aria alone, with its tension of erotic anticipation, the pursuit of pleasure and that of solitary delight, seems a much more likely reason behind the clergy's wrath. Indeed, perhaps the Cardinal Caverot's metaphor of the golden goblet containing poison was not so innocent after all. On the other hand, this aria can be read as a moral tale: it shows that Hérode's pleasure-seeking libido, particularly when expressed through onanism, is punished by sterility. Whatever its interpretation, the opera's transferral of Salomé's dance of the seven veils into a solo aria for a central male protagonist engages with the *fin-de-siècle* preoccupations of the exotic and, moreover, erotic imagination and sexual pollution,

and their link to society's decadence and the degeneration of the nation. Over ten years later, as Louis Gallet and Massenet set *Thaïs*, social degeneracy was perceived as rife; their opera on the tale of a prostitute and an ascetic monk who lost his body and soul to Venus further developed the issue of the erotic subconscious, often in innovative ways, as a clear signifier of society's downfall.

### Athanaël's Visions

Anatole France first published his landmark in decadent literature, his novel *Thaïs*, in 1889. Just five years later, Massenet and his librettist Louis Gallet put *Thaïs* on the Opéra stage, thus inscribing their work into the decadent artistic movement. France drew the story of Saint Thaïs from *Les Vies des Pères du désert*.<sup>37</sup> His novel focused on the character of Paphnuce, the ascetic and hermitic monk who dreams of both Thaïs and the scenes of pagan erotica that she mimes for the delectation of the crowds that flock to see her at the theatre in Alexandria. Believing his vision of Thaïs to be God-given and not the result of his own concupiscence, Paphnuce, despite the warnings of his elders, sets out for Alexandria with the intention of converting Thaïs and placing her in a religious community. Paphnuce pays a high price for his success: as Thaïs dies in Christian ecstasy after three months of self-sacrificing penance, Paphnuce scorns his God for having hidden the eternal truths of love and sensuality from him and declares his carnal passion for the beatified Thaïs. With this new opera, therefore, Gallet and Massenet addressed similar issues as in *Hérodiade*, but in a rather different artistic and social climate.

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<sup>37</sup> It seems that France drew his story from a number of sources (see Marie-Claire Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1984), 1325-8); Robert Arnaud d'Andilly, *Les Vies des Saints Pères des déserts*, nouvelle édition (Paris: Pierre Le Petit, 1679); Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Troisième édition, 3 (Rotterdam, 1715), 697-8; Abbé Jean-François Godescard, *Vies des pères, des martyrs et des autres principaux saints* (Villefranche-de-Rouergue: P. Vedeilhié, 1763-82); Michel-Ange Marin, *Les Vies des Pères des déserts d'Orient* (Tours: A. Mame, 1743); *Collection des vies des Pères du désert, et de quelques saintes*, 7 (Paris: Bureau de l'Association Catholique du Sacré-Cœur, 1829), 142-4. The moral plays of the tenth-century nun Hrotswita were also important source material. Her plays were popularised in France during the nineteenth century by the translations of Charles Magnin: *Théâtre de Hrotsvitha, religieuse allemande du X<sup>e</sup> siècle traduit pour la première fois en français avec le texte latin revue sur le manuscrit de Munich précédé d'une introduction et suivi de notes* (Paris: Benjamin Duprat, 1845). They were even turned into puppet shows by Signoret, to which Anatole France twice dedicated his column in *Le Temps* ("Les Marionettes de M. Signoret", 10 June 1888; "Hrotswita aux marionettes", 7 April 1889.) Significantly, a new translation of Hrotswita's *Paphnutius*, by A. Ferdinand Hérold (Paris: Mercure de Paris, 1895), appeared the year after the opera's première.

The visions in Louis Gallet's scenario for *Thaïs* may be considered more conventional in conception but more cinematographic in realisation than Hérode's "Vision fugitive": on stage, Athanaël (Paphnuce's operatic and more euphonic name) sleeps whilst his dream is played out on another part of the stage. It is hence his dream, rather than Athanaël himself, which holds the audience's attention; the audience experiences his dream first-hand instead of receiving a recounted version of the vision. Thus, like Salomé during Flaubert's description of the dance of the seven veils, it is Thaïs who is both the subject and the object of the (male) gaze by means of which she manages to subjugate her audience. Athanaël is somewhat eclipsed as the audience enters into supposedly direct contact with Thaïs, and it is her actions, rather than Athanaël's vision of them, that become important and the focus of attention.

The first vision in *Thaïs* during Act I conjures up Thaïs in the theatre in Alexandria. Thaïs's skills as an actress are minimised in the libretto in comparison to France's novel: the libretto's designation of Thaïs as a priestess (rather than follower of the cult) of Venus and the emphasis given to her activities as a courtesan mean that her considerable and acclaimed dramatics of the novel are almost eclipsed. All her histrionic talent is condensed into this brief vision scene, which sees her miming scenes of pagan erotica, her talents being reduced to little more than striptease and simulated sex! Thus the acting out of Athanaël's vision for the theatre audience promised a daring spectacle which delighted a large number of the male critics, many apparently reaching hurriedly for their opera glasses.<sup>38</sup> Thaïs was represented by a member of the corps de ballet, Mademoiselle Mante III,<sup>39</sup> dressed in a simple flesh-coloured leotard and sporting a long veil. The score states: "Through the mist, the interior of the theatre in Alexandria appears. Immense crowd on the terraces. The stage where Thaïs (half-naked but her face veiled) mimes the loves of Aphrodite is in the foreground." For modesty's sake, the following instruction was added: "Thaïs, miming for the crowds at the theatre in Alexandria, is only seen, as a result, with her

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<sup>38</sup> Goldstrom (*A Whore in Paradise: The Oratorios of Jules Massenet*, Doctoral thesis, Stanford University, June 1998, 184) refers to this vision scene as "highly charged soft-core pronography".

<sup>39</sup> Having found reference to a Mademoiselle Mante II in the ballet archives (B.n.F, Opéra), I presume Mademoiselle Mante III to be a third member of the same family to have been employed by the Opéra.

back to the public in the auditorium.”<sup>40</sup> This did not stop certain critics, particularly Félicien Champsaur, ‘soiriste’ for *Le Journal*, fantasising over the vision and describing it in a tone worthy of the best decadent literature:

Before Alexandria, ecstatic and screaming with desire, Thaïs, the lasciviously dancing priestess of Aphrodite, appears with steps where her supple waist, her distressing breasts and the indolent swell of her pelvis and the small of her back sway beneath frail gauzes until the moment when, swiftly, she takes all her clothes off – seems to appear naked – to the delight of her adorers.<sup>41</sup>

Champsaur’s description of Thaïs’s ‘dance of the veil’ apparition easily evokes that of Flaubert’s *Salomé*, and closely corresponds to the hoard of *femmes fatales* that ‘plagued’ decadent writers such as Pierre Louÿs. And yet it was not merely the erotic nature of this scene which held the attention of those susceptible to the symbolist aesthetic. Here Massenet’s music and Thaïs’s dance were seen to translate Athanaël’s unconscious thoughts directly. Athanaël, who remains asleep on stage, is totally passive during his vision; his hallucination remains unmediated by his conscious thoughts or his language, and is projected to the audience by means of

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<sup>40</sup> *Thaïs* vocal score, (Paris: Heugel, 1922), 15: “Dans un brouillard apparaît l’intérieur du Théâtre à Alexandrie. Foule immense sur les gradins. En avant se trouve la scène sur laquelle Thaïs (à demi-vêtue, mais le visage voilé) mime les amours d’Aphrodite. Thaïs, mimant devant la foule du Théâtre d’Alexandrie, n’est, par conséquent vue de dos par le public de la salle.” Massenet was concerned by this innovative dramatic representation of *Thaïs*, whose choreography (as well as that of the ballet was by Hansen). He wrote to Gallet in the spring of 1892: “Pouvez-vous voir Anatole France & savoir exactement par lui si au théâtre d’Alexandrie (à cette époque : IV<sup>e</sup> siècle) Thaïs a dansé, ou mimé ? – J’ai besoin de détails précis sur les costumes – il s’agit de la fin du tableau d’Alexandrie dont je donne déjà un aperçu dans l’apparition du 1<sup>er</sup> tableau – Les femmes avaient-elles comme aujourd’hui encore une partie du visage cachée par des voiles ? – [...] Vous savez qu’au premier tableau c’est une danseuse qui simulera Thaïs – la question du visage est urgente – il ne faudrait pas que le public comprenne le stratagème – il doit croire que c’est Thaïs. Et lorsqu’à la fin d’Alexandrie, les esclaves commencent à « dégager Thaïs » [sic] de ses vêtements... et que le rideau cachera la suite de « [sic] l’opération » [sic] aux yeux éveillés des fauteuils, il faut que je sache si la danseuse du 1<sup>er</sup> tableau est habillée ou très peu vêtue – de là dépendra l’effet du tableau suivant.” Cited by Branger, ‘Histoire d’une collaboration : Louis Gallet et Jules Massenet’, *Massenet, Le Roi de Lahore, Hérodiade, L’Avant-Scène Opéra*, 187 (1998), 54-9, at 57. Massenet was therefore concerned not only with the question of mime versus dance (and thus the implications this would have for his audience) and historical authenticity, but was also well aware of the effect this scene was likely to have on its all-male stalls spectators. He paid particular attention though to the dramatic impact of this scene, and its correlative moment at the end of the first tableau of Act II where Sibyl Sanderson prepared to re-enact the pantomime before a carefully-timed curtain fall cut short the visual spectacle which was replaced by a symphonic interlude depicting the ‘amours d’Aphrodite’. The drama ensued with a world-weary Thaïs *chez elle* wishing for eternal beauty. Thus the progression from visual to musical to texted dramatic action may be seen to have been carefully regulated by the composer.

<sup>41</sup> Un monsieur en habit noir, ‘La Soirée Parisienne *Thaïs*’, *Le Journal*, 17 March 1894: “Thaïs, devant Alexandrie, extasiée et hurlante de désirs, apparaît, prêtresse d’Aphrodite aux danses lascives, en des pas où sa taille souple, ses seins affolants et la houle molle de ses reins, et de sa croupe, se balancent sous de frêles gazes jusqu’au moment où, rapide, elle se dévêt toute – semble apparaître nue – aux yeux ravis de ses adorateurs.” For other pornographic descriptions of this scene see also Victorin Joncières, *La Liberté*, 18 March 1894 and Mirliton, *L’Événement*, 17 March 1894.

musical spectacle. It was in this context that several reviewers compared the vision to the contemporary dances of Loïe Fuller.<sup>42</sup>

The Chicago-born Mary Louise Fuller made her Parisian début in 1892 in a form of theatre inspired by a play about hypnotism. While touring with a play in New York in 1890, Fuller was put into a trance by the 'doctor', and then, clothed in a dress of Indian silk, improvised a dance interpretation of the unconscious state provoked by suggestion. From this her dances evolved: exploiting the recent technological advances in electrical lighting to project coloured lights on to a massive train of diaphanous silk, Fuller artfully manipulated swirls and folds of material which, combined with the lighting effects, evoked butterflies, giant flowers, flames and stars.<sup>43</sup> In this way, Fuller proposed a new sort of psychological theatre which presented an incarnation of unconscious forces: images liberated by hypnotic trance were transformed into direct and irregular movement naturally expressed without conscious mediation. It is through this association with Fuller's dances that, as well as continuing a well-established tradition of 'informed' representations of the workings of the unconscious in opera, *Thaïs* may be linked to both artistic symbolism and to the modern scientific current of neuropsychology.<sup>44</sup>

Jean-Martin Charcot's research had intimately linked the physical manifestations of mental disturbance and their visual representation, whether through illustration, photography or comparison to and reproduction of fine-art masterpieces. His experiments with hypnosis during the 1880s also revealed images to be an irresistible force in thought processes. By thus demonstrating the propensity of the mind to receive and project images, Charcot's theories presented a considerable challenge to positivist understanding of the mind and its link to the external world.<sup>45</sup> But the

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<sup>42</sup> See Biguet, *Le Radical*, 18 March 1894: "sur la scène, Thaïs, à demi-vêtue, mime les amours d'Aphrodite et joue de l'écharpe à la Loïe Fuller, puis peu à peu ses vêtements glissent ..... glissent." See also the anonymous critic for *Le Constitutionnel*, 18 March 1894: "Athanaël [...] la [Thaïs] voit apparaître au loin, dans un vapoureux costume, esquissant une danse qui tient de la danse du ventre et de celle de la Loïe Fuller". The physical similarities between the vision scene and Fuller's dances—spotlights and veils—made their connection all the more obvious.

<sup>43</sup> See Loïe Fuller, *Quinze ans de ma vie*, preface by Anatole France (Paris: Librairie Félix Juven, 1908); Giovanni Lista, *Loïe Fuller : Danseuse de la Belle Epoque*, (Paris: Stock, Somogy éditions d'art, 1994); Susan Youens, "'Le Soleil des morts': A fin-de-siècle Portrait Gallery", *Nineteenth-Century Music*, XI, 1 (Summer 1987), 43-58.

<sup>44</sup> Silverman, 299-300.

<sup>45</sup> Silverman, 84.

theories of Henri Bergson went further, and in his own experiments with hypnosis and suggestion, Bergson witnessed a tendency, as Hippolyte Bernheim had indicated, to transform ideas into images.<sup>46</sup> His 1889 *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* opened with a discussion of the way in which the artist could replace the hypnotist as an agent of a direct, unmediated access to the unconscious, his visual material providing a point of entry to the unconscious world.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the medical transition from early psychiatry to Freudian psychoanalysis was at a crucial point in 1894, for the notion of degeneracy as the cause of sexual deviancy and neurasthenia held by positivist and rationalist thinkers such as Nordau (and to a lesser extent, Charcot) was proving too rigid for Freud, who was willing to admit psychological factors to the cause of neurosis.<sup>48</sup> Freud claimed that normal, conscious mental activity was made up of concepts which were replaced by images in unconscious thought; hallucination was an abnormal psychological elaboration of unconscious thoughts, childhood and/or repressed desires.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, both Bergson and Freud relied heavily on pictorial definitions, descriptions and metaphors in their dream theories, where sleep allowed the resurgence of subterranean memories to conscious thought.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the special role played by the image in the new psychology at the end of the nineteenth century nurtured the concept of non-texted, abstract and (non-)figurative language in art—with manifestations as diverse as symbolist literature and Loïe Fuller's dances to Massenet's use of orchestral interludes and pantomime vision scenes in *Thaïs*—to translate the workings of the human unconscious.<sup>51</sup>

A living embodiment of art nouveau, Loïe Fuller personified the 'fille fleur', a fusion of botany and female eroticism,<sup>52</sup> and her dances were greatly appreciated by decadent artistic society. Toulouse-Lautrec famously created a series of lithographs,

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<sup>46</sup> Silverman, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Silverman, 90, 301.

<sup>48</sup> Gilman, 206.

<sup>49</sup> Ouriel Reshef, *Guerre, mythes et caricature: au berceau d'une mentalité française*, (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1984), 54. The eminent and important figure in French psychoanalysis Pierre Janet is attributed the 'invention' of the word *subconscient*, as opposed to unconscious. See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York, 1970), 357, referred to in Rosario, 202, 253.

<sup>50</sup> Silverman, 309-11.

<sup>51</sup> Silverman, 301.

highlighted with watercolour, in which the dancer is almost lost from sight beneath her billowing veils, identified as an abstraction of unconscious 'pure' motion.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the best literary evocations of the dance were written by Camille Mauclair in both *Le Soleil des morts* and his reviews of Fuller's performances at the 1900 Exposition universelle.<sup>54</sup> His 'real-life' descriptions of Fuller's dance idealised a symbolist idea of pure art with redemptive qualities: consolatory and purifying, the dance lifted the spectator out of the real despised world and transported him into a realm of dream and subconscious activity.<sup>55</sup> In his *roman à clé*, Mauclair, via his fictitious narrator André de Neuze, goes further however, taking a step back to read the dances, their creator and their audience as the embodiment of decadence, of the twilight of an artistic society which is self-destructing, rather than as an escape from such a society.<sup>56</sup> Descriptions of the vision scene from *Thaïs* find resonance in Mauclair's literary accounts of Fuller's art.<sup>57</sup> Anatole France saw Fuller as a consolatory figure of social ills and personal doubt. Jules Claretie, Massenet's librettist for *Amadis*, *La Navarraise* and *Thérèse*, convinced Fuller to write her memoirs, which appeared in 1908, preceded by a preface by Anatole France himself.<sup>58</sup> France's personal testament to the dancer highlighted the archaic and mystical qualities of her dance:

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<sup>52</sup> See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 242-4 on the 'filles fleurs' and the influence of Wagner's *Parsifal* on fine-art depictions of the 'eroticised flower'.

<sup>53</sup> Youens, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Camille Mauclair, *Le Soleil des morts*, serialised in *La Nouvelle revue* in 1897, was published as a novel in 1898. For his reviews of the Exposition universelle performances, see, in particular, 'Sada Yacco et Loïe Fuller', *La Revue blanche*, XXIII, 177, 15 October 1900, 277-83. Stéphane Mallarmé did not describe the visual aspects of the dance but preferred to read the dance as a signifier, "the visual incorporation of the Idea" (Youens, 52) in his 'Considerations sur l'art du Ballet et de la Loïe Fuller', first published in the *National Observer*, 13 March 1893.

<sup>55</sup> See Lista, 366-8. Mauclair's idealised and devotional description of Fuller's art as the pure religion of 'Art' never, however, makes reference to or grapples with the 'problem' of the highly technical and mechanical aspects to Fuller's creation.

<sup>56</sup> Mauclair, *Le Soleil des morts. Roman contemporain* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1898), 265-6.

<sup>57</sup> See Lista, 266, citing Mauclair, 15 October 1900: "Loïe Fuller surgit des ténèbres, traînant avec un geste de lassitude suprême un fardeau de flammes qui la révet et la ploie sous sa magnificence dévorante [...] la sacerdotal prêtresse du feu pur. [...] Aux ténèbres de nouveau régnantes [...] peu à peu se précise et s'impose la grande créature ennuagée de lune ;"

<sup>58</sup> Fuller's *Quinze ans de ma vie* contains the following passage, supposedly written by Fuller's young female companion Gab Sorère (alias Gabrielle Bloch) at the age of fourteen. It contains similar language and images to Mauclair's texts: Fuller's dances are born of social decadence and through Fuller's recreation of the human unconscious, she exorcises social fears. Fuller, 259-61: "A travers la nuit brune filtre un reflet pâli qui palpète. Et tandis que dans l'air des pétales s'envolent, une fleur d'or surhumaine s'allonge vers le ciel. Elle n'est pas sœur des fleurs terrestres qui sur nos âmes endolories fleurissent leurs parcelles de rêve. Comme elles la fleur gigantesque ne s'offre pas consolante. Mais le surnaturel la vit naître. Elle a germé dans une région fantastique sous un rayon bleui de lune. La vie bat en sa chair transparente et ses feuilles claires s'échevèlent dans l'ombre telles de grands bras

It is the quest for the *divine* [...] she is profoundly religious with a highly developed critical sense and a perpetual concern for the destiny of humanity. [...] she welcomed my doubts with a serene air, smiling in the face of the abyss. [...] From a distance, in a dream one admires an ethereal figure, comparable in grace to those dancers that one sees, in paintings from Pompeï, floating in their light veils. You can also find this apparition in real life, faded and hidden under the thicker veils in which mortals envelop themselves, and you will perceive that she is someone full of heart and wit, a somewhat mystical, philosophical, religious, elevated, cheerful and noble soul. [...] she] restitutes the lost wonders of Greek mime, that art of voluptuous yet mystic movements which interpret natural phenomena and the metamorphosis of living beings.<sup>59</sup>

France's view of Loïe Fuller hardly differs from his description of his own heroine Thais: both are mystical, sensual performers. France, however, takes pains to defend the moral character of Loïe Fuller which is, at the same time, identifiable with Thais's faith in universal beauty and the goodness of humanity. Through their shared serene sensuality and sincere mysticism, both women are seen to console and comfort men in moments of doubt and trouble. France's reference to the dreamworld reinforces the link between the two dancers and the combination of dream and dance elements in both France's novel and Massenet's opera firmly grounds the story of *Thais* in its era of decadence, symbolism and art nouveau.

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tourmentés. Toute une floraison de rêve s'étire et pense. Le poème animé de la fleur chante là: délicate, fugitive et mystérieuse. [...] L'âme de la danse devait naître dans ce siècle douloureux et fiévreux. Loïe Fuller cisela du rêve. Nos désirs fou, nos peurs du néant, elle les dit dans sa danse du feu. Pour apaiser notre soif d'oubli elle humanisa les fleurs. Plus heureuse que ses frères les créateurs elle fit vivre son œuvre silencieuse et, dans la nuit, ce décor des grandes choses, nulle tâche humaine n'amointrit sa beauté. [...] elle est papillon, elle est feu, elle est lumière, ciel, étoiles. [...] Pour calmer nos âmes meurtries et nos cauchemars d'enfants une icône fragile danse dans une robe de ciel." ["Through the brown night, filters a fading glint that quivers. And whilst the air blows petals away, a superhuman golden flower stretches to the sky. She is not the sister of earthly flowers which blossom their dream garden on our aching souls. Like them, the gigantic flower offers no consolation. It is born of the supernatural. It germinated in a fantasy region under a blue moonbeam. Life beats in its transparent flesh and its light leaves are ruffled in the shadows like long tormented arms. A great flowering of dreams stretches and reflects. The animated poem of the flower sings there: delicate, fugitive and mysterious. [...] The soul of the dance had to be born in this painful and feverish century. Loïe Fuller fashions dreams. Our mad desires, our fears of emptiness, she expresses them in her fire dance. To quench our thirst for oblivion she humanises flowers. Happier than her brother creators, she breaths life into her silent works and, in the night, that immense setting, no human stain can diminish her beauty. [...] she is butterfly, she is fire, she is light, sky, stars. [...] To calm our wounded souls and our childish nightmares a fragile icon dances in a dress made of sky."]

<sup>59</sup> See France's preface in Fuller, 6-8: "C'est la recherche du *divin* [...] elle est profondément religieuse avec un esprit d'examen très aigu et un souci perpétuel de la destinée humaine. [...] elle a accueilli mes doutes d'un air serein, en souriant à l'abîme. [...] Vous admirez de loin, en rêve, une figure aérienne, comparable en grâce à ces danseuses qu'on voit, sur les peintures de Pompeï, flotter dans leurs voiles légers. Un jour vous retrouverez cette apparition dans la réalité de la vie, éteinte et cachée sous ces voiles plus épais dont s'enveloppent les mortels, et vous vous apercevrez que c'est une personne pleine d'esprit et de cœur, une âme un peu mystique, philosophique, religieuse, très haute, très riante et très noble. [...] elle] nous rendit les merveilles perdues de la mimique grecque, l'art de ces mouvements à la fois voluptueux et mystiques qui interprètent les phénomènes de la nature et les métamorphoses des êtres." The copy of Fuller's book held in the Réserve of the Bibliothèque



### Athanaël's Temptation Ballet

The audacity of the opera's vision scenes was rivalled by the fantastical Temptation ballet. Both elements gave rise to concerns about decadence, not only due to what was perceived as formal incoherence in an opera but also due to the spectacle they involved. The similarity of certain scenes to shows from the boulevard theatres, such as the Nouveautés, the Folies-Bergère, or even the Châtelet was voyeuristically appreciated and yet highly disapproved of. The fact that such spectacle had made its way onto the nation's first lyric stage was yet more evidence of Massenet's decadence and the danger it could spell for a respected national institution. The ballet was, in fact, a phantasmagorical enactment of Athanaël's concupiscence.<sup>60</sup> The press continuously referred to it as a sort of *Tentation de saint Antoine*, but it was not only Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same name which was uppermost in critics' minds. Several made reference to the repertoire of fairground puppet shows of their youth, but a more recent 'animated' and irreverent version of the story had caught Parisian artistic attention. During the 1887/8 season, the satirical literary cabaret theatre *Le Chat noir* gave a "féerie à grand spectacle" on the same subject in the form of a light show with silhouette puppets set against scenery painted on transparent filters. This spectacle had a profound effect on Anatole France, who expressed his admiration in his newspaper column in *Le Temps*, and set about an in-depth meditation essay on the true-life history of Saint Anthony which directly inspired his characterisation of Paphnuce for passages of his novel *Thaïs*.<sup>61</sup> Like Antoine/Paphnuce, Athanaël is visited by a catalogue of voluptuous spirits, sirens, gnomes and spectres,<sup>62</sup> and his perdition is personified by the 'étoile' dancer, Rosita Mauri. Through dances as

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nationale de France bears an autograph dedication to Loïe Fuller from Anatole France that reads as follows: "A Loïe Fuller/au génie, à la beauté,/avec ferveur et humilité/Anatole France."

<sup>60</sup> A fairly faithful picture of the original *ballet de la Tentation* can be obtained from the press. See particularly *Intérim*, *Le Monde Artiste*, 18 March 1894 & *Le Monde illustré*, 17 March 1894.

<sup>61</sup> See Anatole France, 'La Vie littéraire. La Tentation de saint Antoine, féerie à grand spectacle en deux actes et quarante tableaux, par Henri Rivière. (Plon et Nourrit, éditeurs)', *Le Temps*, 12 August 1888. See Marie-Claire Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1984), 1327. Anatole France wrote his piece at the time of publication of an album of watercolours drawn from the show. France considered such art to be "à la fois mystique et impie, ironique et triste, naïf et profond ; jamais respectueux. [...] Elles [les aquarelles] sont d'une couleur vive, d'un goût hardi, d'un bel effet et d'un grand sens. Je mets cela bien au-dessus des diabolins du sec Callot." The show, in fact, transported Saint Anthony's temptation from the desert to Paris (les Halles, la Bourse etc.) in order to, according to France, allow both a prophetic and contemporary reading of the story. On the eve of the première of *Thaïs*, France explained his setting of the story in Alexandria in similar terms. See France, *Le Figaro*, 15 March 1894.

<sup>62</sup> Bianchini's costume designs for these characters can be seen at the B.n.F Opéra, D. 216, and were faithfully drawn by E. Mesplès following the dress rehearsal in the *Monde illustré* of 17 March 1894, 173. These "croquis" are reproduced in *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109 (May 1988), 74.

varied as a religious march, a spritely waltz and an infernal round, *La Perdition* is set to win the soul of Athanaël when the 'star of redemption' appears, accompanied by an *Andante religioso* played by the sacred and celestial organ. All hope is soon lost, however; the organ and the redemption star fade and Athanaël is drawn into the infernal sabbath.

Through the use of pantomimic ballet, Gallet's and Massenet's work revived and developed lost traditions. *Ballets d'action* had been seen at the Opéra from the late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>63</sup> Following in the tradition instigated by Jean-Georges Noverre's ballet reforms of the 1770s, operas such as *La Muette de Portici* (1828) by Eugene Scribe and Daniel François Esprit Auber, and ballet-operas such as Halévy's and Gide's *La Tentation* (1832) were produced at the Opéra and presented mimed characters who communicated with singing ones.<sup>64</sup> However, mimed/danced characters were only really accepted if there was a dramatic reason why they could not express themselves through words (such as the mute Fenella of Auber's opera) or if they were supernatural creatures, "incapable of and uninterested in language".<sup>65</sup> By the 1830s, however, the popularity of dramatic ballet was on the wane, for its use of mime, considered a less valid form of dance than traditional ballet, was viewed as a form incapable of communicating dramatic action.<sup>66</sup> This opinion arose from an aesthetic position regarding wordless dance: for certain mid-century critics, dance had to correspond to a moment of dance narration—plot justification was needed to admit its presence—whereas in opera, singing was the norm and narration of song was rarely perceived as possessing a different narrative function from the vocal

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<sup>63</sup> Marian Smith, "'Poésie lyrique' and 'Chorégraphie' at the Opéra in the July Monarchy", *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 4, 1 (March 1992), 1-19.

<sup>64</sup> *La Tentation*, ballet-opéra en cinq actes, [...] musique de l'opéra par [Fromental] Halévy, musique du ballet par Halévy et C[asimir] Gide, was also a paraphrased version of the Temptation of Saint Anthony and thus certain scenes, such as those representing hermitic desert life or the temptation itself with legion supernatural beings, bore striking resemblance to tableaux from *Thaïs*. Théodore de Lajarte states that from its 24<sup>th</sup> performance, *La Tentation* was nearly always only partially performed (normally the second or fourth act was given), and in this way it reached a total of 104 performances. See Lajarte, *Bibliothèque musicale du Théâtre de l'Opéra*, 2 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969), 143. Although I have not traced the ballet's performances in *Le Journal de L'Opéra*, it seems unlikely that Gallet or Massenet would have seen it, although they may have seen the libretto and/or score. The ballet was never performed at the Palais Garnier. See Stéphane Wolff, *L'Opéra au Palais Garnier (1875-1962)* (Paris and Genève: Slatkine, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Smith, 8.

<sup>66</sup> This sort of opinion persisted throughout the century: mime was associated with low-brow, boulevard theatre entertainment and in 1873, Gustave Choquet expressed his opinion that mime was incapable of communicating drama. See Smith, 14-5.

music that surrounded it.<sup>67</sup> Thus, for the audience at the première of *Thaïs*, the pantomimic and phantasmagorical Temptation ballet was acceptable in as much as it portrayed supernatural characters, but unacceptable in the hermitic monk Athanaël's full yet mute participation in the ballet. In this way, however, Massenet and Gallet shifted the communicative importance of their work away from the libretto to the overall theatrical concept, highlighting the power of dance to convey dramatic action.<sup>68</sup> Yet it was not only through ballet and mime that they did so, but also through the inclusion of orchestral interludes of programmatic music which will be discussed in the following chapter. Thus it is not only the power of dance but also that of music to convey drama that was addressed in *Thaïs*, and the scenario, comprising lengthy passages of non-logocentric action (which were often judged as part of the work's decadence), afford new insights into the narrative procedures of music and dance and how they were perceived during the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, due to its pantomimic character, several difficult scene changes and sombre lighting,<sup>69</sup> the ballet was cut considerably following the première, and definitively cut after the eighth performance.<sup>70</sup> In the third volume of his *Cours de composition musicale*, Vincent d'Indy discussed pantomime and decried the modern, stereotypical pantomime which was reduced to stock formulas.<sup>71</sup> For the arch-Wagnerian d'Indy, it was no doubt only in the context of Wagnerian musical dramas that the pantomime retained its true logic. The Venusberg ballet at the start of the

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<sup>67</sup> For an extended study of narrative strategies in nineteenth-century opera, see Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>68</sup> Gallet was, however, reticent about the ballet, which he continued to see as a compromise to the conventions of the Opéra, believing it to interrupt somewhat the otherwise perfect musical impetus of the work. See his 'Théâtre. Musique', *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1 April 1894, 643-8, at 647.) Anselm Gerhard (*The Urbanization of Opera*, 145-8) sees Scribe and Auber's achievement in *La Muette de Portici* as a new synthesis of different theatrical elements which dispensed with the verbal content of literary dialogue in opera. This sort of synthesis was later developed in a different vein by Wagner in his *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

<sup>69</sup> Dimmed house lights and near blackout on stage for certain sections of the ballet rendered reading of the ballet's libretto impossible (*Thaïs, Comédie lyrique en trois actes, sept tableaux, poème de Louis Gallet, d'après le roman de M. Anatole France, musique de J. Massenet*, (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1894), 37-40), and thus the mimed action was even more incomprehensible to those spectators indisposed to pantomime at the Opéra.

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Christophe Branger, 'Genèse et innovations de *Thaïs*', *Leonard de Vinci Opéra de Rouen programme, saison 1998-1999*, 26-8, at 28.

<sup>71</sup> Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Troisième livre rédigé par Guy de Lioncourt, (Paris: Durand, 1950) (written by D'Indy c. 1905), 325-6: "Ce genre [qui] peut influencer grandement et heureusement sur l'art dramatique lui-même. [...] Malheureusement dans le ballet moderne [...] la pantomime devient stéréotypée [...], elle se résoud fatalement en formules."

Parisian version of *Tannhäuser* was perhaps the most notorious example of ballet pantomimes for the French opera-going public.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, this ballet bears a strong resemblance to the *Ballet de la Tentation* from *Thaïs*, pitting the male protagonist against the forces of perdition, and representing attempts to seduce Tannhäuser and Athanaël respectively from the righteous path. The contemporary press, however, more often linked the ballet from *Thaïs* to that of *Robert le Diable*.<sup>73</sup> Although Meyerbeer's opera antedated Wagner's, since its première in 1831 it had remained at the core of the Opéra repertoire, right up until 1893 when, on 28 August, *Robert* received its 751<sup>st</sup> and last performance at the Opéra.<sup>74</sup> In Meyerbeer's opera, Bertram (the Devil) calls a community of sacrilegious nuns back from the dead in order to seduce Robert (his human son) from the path of humanity and goodness, and to entice him to steal a magic reed in return for which the devil will grant Robert immortal power. The scenarios of the two operas' ballets are, indeed, strikingly similar. [See Appendix 5 for a comparison of the scenarios of the ballets from *Robert le Diable* and *Thaïs*.] Indeed, *Robert* was one of the earlier in a line of operas which employed more and more ingenuity to satisfy operagoers' desire for erotic spectacle.<sup>75</sup> Ballerinas appearing here as debauched ghost nuns, and bathing in a river in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836) were excuses for the display of dancers in ever more "delicate" positions.

The Temptation ballet in *Thaïs*, as well as the Venusberg ballet, also put the female body to spectacular use. As in *Tannhäuser*, the ballet takes place in the realm of a female deity. Venus and Perdition are not merely the female actors of (male) diabolical forces but act on their own desires in their respective operas. Their worlds are thus characterised by all that is considered irrational and sensual. Athanaël's temptation is a dream; the regulators of his reason are open to the feminised corruption of the night and all the sensual pleasures that Athanaël has repressed in his daily life: nature, food, perfume, worldly goods, human tenderness and love. Like

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<sup>72</sup> *Tannhäuser* was infamously premièred in Paris in 1861. For more detail, see Kahane & Wild, *Wagner et la France*.

<sup>73</sup> See Biguet, *Le Radical*, 18 March 1894; Garnier, *L'Europe Artiste*, 25 March 1894; Jullien, *Le Journal des débats*, 17 March 1894; O'Divy, *La Libre parole*, 17 March 1894. Only Litte (alias André Suarès) in *La République française* (18 March 1894) likened the *Thaïs* ballet to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*.

<sup>74</sup> Wolff, *L'Opéra au Palais Garnier (1875-1962)*, 184-6.

<sup>75</sup> Gerhard, 232-3.

Hérode (and Robert), he too is offered the 'coupe des ivresses impures'.<sup>76</sup> Athanaël can thus be identified with Hérode, who by taking a similar philtre, accomplished his vision and sank more deeply into decadence and social pollution. Like Hérode, therefore, Athanaël may be read as a degenerate element within society, and the phantasmagorical ballet as the physical translation of his degeneracy. The *Ballet de la Tentation* not only provided decadent dramatic spectacle, therefore, but its formal conception and use of pantomime were also considered decadent elements within operatic construction.

### Decadence and the General Reception of *Thaïs*

Premièred thirteen years after *Hérodiade*, *Thaïs* and its press reception were much more concerned with decadence in both artistic and social terms. Anatole France's *Thaïs* character conformed to the decadent *femme fatale* topos of the *fin de siècle*: she is constructed by male fantasy and viewed by the reader through the workings of the unconscious of the 'hero'; she embodies sensuality and exoticism, represents physical and moral ambiguity; she is man's ruin.<sup>77</sup> The opera's authors closely followed France's original voluptuous portrayal of *Thaïs*, conceiving a character who represented universal desire. Her conversion is accomplished by the simple transfer from the physical to the spiritual plane of her natural appreciation of all that is beautiful in life, without the need for a dramatic or wholesale reversal of character. Like *Marie-Magdeleine*, and *Hérodiade* before it, *Thaïs* pitted a nubile courtesan against a sorely tempted holy man, in an opera in which the boundaries between carnal and celestial sentiments were continuously blurred. Gallet and Massenet preferred to portray Athanaël as a proud and harsh *convertisseur* rather than a serene hermit, thus sticking closely to the character painted by Anatole France as someone who, finding doubt intolerable, had banished all "fine virtues" from his soul.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> From the ballet scenario [see Appendix 5], it seems as if Athanaël is only offered the 'cup of impure delights' rather than actually drinking from it.

<sup>77</sup> See Mireille Dottin-Orsini, *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale : textes et images de la misogynie fin-de-siècle*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993); Jean Pierrot, *L'imaginaire décadent 1880-1900*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977), 52-3.

<sup>78</sup> Anatole France, 'Thaïs', *Le Figaro*, 15 March 1894. This article takes the form of an open letter from Anatole France to the editor of *Le Figaro* on the eve of the première of *Thaïs*, explaining his vision of and intentions for his novel, as well as his admiration for and gratitude to Massenet and Louis Gallet.

Following France's own anticlerical position in their attitude to Catholicism, they made no attempt to depict Athanaël as divinely inspired or on a God-given mission.<sup>79</sup>

It was over this detail that the opera received its harshest criticisms. The authors were accused of missing the grandeur and thus the spiritual downfall of the religious man by those critics who, as in the case of Jean Baptiste, wished to see a father of the Christian Church represented respectfully. A number of critics from across the political and artistic spectrums desired a dichotomy in the literary and musical portrayals of a worldly courtesan and a celestial monk, and wanted to witness the protagonists' respective changes of attitude and behaviour in reaction to each other's doctrines.<sup>80</sup> When they did not find such opposition or interaction, instead encountering sometimes similar sensual musical expressions for both characters or, indeed, Thaïs portrayed as more serenely inspired than Athanaël, they admonished Massenet's shallowness of characterisation, or lack of any specific characterisation at all.<sup>81</sup> Thus Massenet was seen to follow his usual scenario—the “battle of the courtesan and the priest”<sup>82</sup> or “sacerdotal love” where the “ecclesiastical robes add to the attraction of the forbidden fruit”<sup>83</sup>—and to his shop-worn types of characters. Critics noted the interchangeability between characters such as Athanaël and Des Grieux, Thaïs and Manon.<sup>84</sup>

But it was Massenet's innovative formal style and accommodation of Sibyl Sanderson, his preferred diva, that marked the culmination of the press rhetoric

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<sup>79</sup> Indeed, whilst much so-called decadent art reintroduced a mystical element, it was generally by no means less anticlerical than naturalist literature.

<sup>80</sup> Camille Bellaigue, *La Revue des deux mondes*, CXXII (1 April 1894), 702-7, at 705; Louis de Fourcaud, *Le Gaulois*, 17 March 1894, Bertrand Fauvet, *Notes d'art et d'archéologie*, IV (April 1894), 61-4. This last journal is qualified in the *Annuaire de la presse française et du monde politique 1894* (29), as a ‘publication illustrée de la Société de Saint-Jean pour l'encouragement de l'art chrétien, reconnue d'utilité publique.’

<sup>81</sup> Henry Bauër, *L'Echo de Paris*, 18 March 1894; Alfred Bruneau, *Gil Blas*, 18 March 1894; Léon Garnier, *L'Europe Artiste*, 25 March 1894; Auguste Gouillet, *Le Soleil*, 17 March 1894; Adolphe Jullien, *Le Journal des débats*, 17 March 1894.

<sup>82</sup> Bruneau, *Gil Blas*, 18 March, 1894.

<sup>83</sup> O'Divy [alias Emile de Saint-Auban], *La Libre parole*, 17 March 1894.

<sup>84</sup> Thaïs was sung by Sibyl Sanderson whose previous incarnations of Manon and Esclarmonde, and the Parisian airs she lent to the fourth-century courtesan, did nothing to counteract this comparison. See Litte [alias André Suarès], *La République française*, 18 March 1894; Charles Martel, *La Justice*, 18 March 1894.

concerned with decadence.<sup>85</sup> The opera was written as a showcase for Sibyl Sanderson's vocal capacities and plastic charms. Sanderson had an exclusive contract with the Opéra-Comique between 1891 and 1893. Massenet and Gallet conceived their work with this in mind, devising a scenario comprising only two principal characters, unusual symphonic interludes and daring mimed vision scenes. However, on the director Carvalho's refusal to increase her salary, Sanderson accepted an offer she could not refuse from Bertrand and Gailhard, the directors of the Opéra, trailing *Thaïs* in her wake.<sup>86</sup> This transfer of the already orchestrated score from the Opéra-Comique to the Opéra required various modifications to conform to the conventions of the Académie nationale de musique and the expectations of its public. The overall form of the opera, however, remained something of a hybrid. Massenet experimented with new structural procedures: the second and third acts each comprised three tableaux linked by symphonic interludes of dramatic importance,<sup>87</sup> and the inserted pantomimic ballet was more than a traditional *divertissement*, also fulfilling a dramatic purpose. The intimacy produced by the opera's focus on two principal characters on the vast Opéra stage was criticised by a public used to works of epic proportions, both in scale and in numbers of singers, dancers and actors.<sup>88</sup> That these characters were presented in a succession of non-classically cut duets, which were juxtaposed with certain comic ensemble scenes written in decidedly opéra-comique vein sat unhappily with the Opéra's discerning audience. In this light, the vision scenes and symphonic interludes were considered as merely compensatory, making up for the lack of real dramatic content, to fill out a score of meagre proportions. Massenet's desire to show off Sanderson to her full potential went as far as to affect his orchestration, for through lighter, more transparent scoring every time Sanderson sang, Massenet put paid to any fears that her voice would not project throughout the

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<sup>85</sup> The degeneracy of Massenet's musical idiom was treated in a 'portrait-charge' caricature by Charvic that appeared on the front cover of *La Silhouette* a week after the première (25 March 1894). Sibyl Sanderson, with flowing blonde locks and immodestly plunging décolleté, is perched on top of Massenet's instrument, an upright piano. The 'happy couple' resemble figurines on top of a wedding cake—the traditional 'pièce montée'—which is being shovelled on the 'peel of the critique' into the 'national oven of music' (i.e. the Opéra). Yet the 'pièce' is 'montée en graine': it has 'run to seed', and thus the caricature attacks Massenet's musical idiom as decadent, worn out and unproductive.

<sup>86</sup> Patrick Gillis, 'Thaïs dans tous ses états: Genèse et remaniements', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, May 1988, 66-74, at 66.

<sup>87</sup> Massenet had previously used a similar dramatic symphony to link tableaux in both Acts II and III of *Esclarmonde*, and to dramatically link the third and fourth acts of *Werther*. In this last case, the orchestral interlude actually forms the first tableau of Act IV.

<sup>88</sup> Henri Bauër, *Echo de Paris*, 18 March 1894; André Corneau, *Le Jour*, 17 March 1894; Charles Darcours, *Le Figaro*, 17 March 1894; Auguste Gouillet, *Le Soleil*, 17 March 1894.

auditorium of the Opéra.<sup>89</sup> Such muted musical language, however, led to critical accusations of banality and insipidness. Indeed, the perceived orchestral restraint, lack of inspiration and the want of a powerful design and “male” clarity in the organisation of the work all seemed to have led to negative evaluations of inconsistency and impoverishment.<sup>90</sup> Both Massenet and his musical language were described as coquettish and concerned with artifice: in short, as effeminate. Through his pandering to Sibyl Sanderson, Massenet and his musical idiom were seen as feminised, emasculated and impotent.

Degeneration was the social buzz word at the time of the première of *Thaïs*. Max Nordau published his monograph *Dégénérescence* in two volumes in December 1893 and March 1894, and its influence in not only Parisian society but also throughout Europe was not particularly long-lived but immediate and widespread.<sup>91</sup> Né Simon Maximilian Südfeld in Budapest, Nordau was a positivist philosopher, a writer of plays, novels and literary criticism and a pioneer of political Zionism as well as being a doctor. He lived in Paris during the 1880s where he studied with Charcot whilst remaining foreign correspondent for the *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin) and the *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna).<sup>92</sup> Nordau’s book, following on from Bénédict-Augustin Morel’s 1857 *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine* explicitly linked the medical ‘pathological’ to the artistic category ‘degenerate’. It did so by applying the social and criminal theories of the Italian Cesare Lombroso (probably the best-known medical champion of the concept of degeneracy as the central explanation of deviancy and to whom Nordau’s book is

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<sup>89</sup> Most of the critics referred to this fact, although far fewer discerned the part played by Massenet and his orchestration. See for example, Félix Régner, *Le Journal*, 17 March 1894: “Les éclats de lumière qui traversent son orchestre sont parfois estompés à l’excès pour permettre à l’organe de M<sup>me</sup> Sanderson de se développer sans trop d’efforts dans l’étendue entière de la salle.” [“The shards of light that cross his orchestra are sometimes dimmed to excess to enable M<sup>me</sup> Sanderson’s voice to expand without too much effort throughout the auditorium.”]

<sup>90</sup> See Alfred Bruneau, *Gil Blas*, 18 March 1894; André Corneau, *Le Jour*, 18 March 1894; Henri de Curzon, *La Gazette de France*, 18 March 1894; Don Blasius [alias Auguste Foureau], *L’Intransigeant*, 18 March 1894; Louis de Fourcaud, *Le Gaulois*, 17 March 1894; Paul Ginisty, *Le Petit Parisien*, 17 March 1894; Charles Martel, *La Justice*, 18 March 1894; Jules Martin, *L’Estafette*, 18 March 1894. It should be noted that these accusations of decadence appear in newspapers covering a wide range of political tendencies, from the royalist *La Gazette de France* to the radical republican *La Justice*.

<sup>91</sup> Originally published as *Entartung* in 1892. See Steven E. Aschheim, ‘Max Nordau, Friedrich Nietzsche et “Dégénérescence”’, in Delphine Bechtel, Dominique Bourel & Jacques Le Ridier (eds.), *Max Nordau (1849-1923) : Critique de la dégénérescence, médiateur franco-allemand, père fondateur du sionisme* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1996), 133-47, at 134; Silverman, 82. See also the anonymous *Regeneration. A Reply to Max Nordau* (Westminster: A. Constable, 1895), 9.

<sup>92</sup> Biographical detail is drawn from Bechtel, Bourel & Ridier (eds.), *Max Nordau (1849-1923)*.



dedicated) to the analysis of art and artists.<sup>93</sup> Nordau's books systematically catalogued a range of artistic perversions, relating them to contemporary medical discourse in order to prove their artistic worth(lessness) and thus the physical degeneracy of their creators.

Nordau was largely concerned with literature, regarding elitist literary society as a minute but influential part of the human population which, by forming itself into closed artistic schools—Parnassians, Decadents, Symbolists—managed to disseminate corrupt aesthetic ideals among a wide and innocent public.<sup>94</sup> Mysticism—the result of an intellectual incapacity or unwillingness to apply observation and reasoned judgement to ambiguous thought—was seen as a basic aberration and as a classic symptom shown by degenerates, hysterics and the insane. For Nordau, therefore, decadent writers willingly suppressed their reason and internalised voice of discipline as defined by Voltaire; they thus toyed with a false, feminised identification of their 'self', causing mysticism, an abomination to positivist ideals. Nordau diagnosed mysticism in the aesthetics of the British Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the French Decadent and Symbolist writers, Tolstoy's conception of the world and in the works of Richard Wagner. He declared Ibsen the champion of masochism and Nietzsche the champion of sadism in this hall of perversion. Real *Art*, as opposed to the filth and obscenities which travestied art—i.e. the degenerate art produced by the aforementioned authors—was seen as synonymous with beauty, and beauty synonymous with morality. The supreme work of art was considered a manifestation of the life force and health of a developed species.<sup>95</sup> However, Nordau, in over a thousand pages of text, never actually named the artists he believed could create such marvels. His praise was reserved for the various moral, philosophical and medical treatises and essays that dealt, like his own opus, with the 'problems' in art and society. The degeneracy of artistic creations was thus seen as a symptom of the author's deviancy, Nordau equating artists and the characters they created in a similar way to Voltaire. Nordau's condemnation of certain artists went as far as the application of Lombroso's diagnosis, *d'après* Darwin, of physical indicators of degeneracy. Nordau observed that Mallarmé had

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<sup>93</sup> Gilman, 221, 236; Rosario, 163.

<sup>94</sup> Max Nordau, *Dégénérescence*, trans. Auguste Dietrich, (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1894), 1, 178-9.

<sup>95</sup> Nordau, 2, 164.

long, pointed ears like a satyr, a sexually immoral goat-man prominent in symbolist art. He went on to demonstrate how the simian nature of this peculiarity established the atavistic and degenerate signification of overly long and pointed auricles which were frequently found in criminals and the insane.<sup>96</sup> The fact that Mallarmé was unprolific as a writer was seen as proof of his sterility, and thus Nordau realigned Mallarmé's intellectual merit and influence on successive generations to his own taste.

Nordau's book was widely read. The leading article in *Le Figaro* on 4 March 1894 took a mocking tone, ridiculing Lombroso's and Nordau's theories, particularly those relating to evolutionary ideas, and questioned the intelligence of such medical men who were unable to see through the "fumisterie contemporaine", the illusion of degeneracy intentionally created by symbolist artists.<sup>97</sup> More serious debate took place in the *Revue des deux mondes* where René Doumic estimated Nordau's scientific rhetoric as an illusion to hide his far from rigorous reasoning.<sup>98</sup> Doumic condemned Nordau's narrow, straitjacketed vision of the human mind based purely on positivist ideals and ignoring any other dimension.<sup>99</sup> Even music journals such as the *Méneestrel* reviewed the publication of each of Nordau's two volumes, the second article appearing in the same issue as a review of the première of *Thaïs*. This traditionally conservative periodical contained two short summaries of each volume following their publication which tended to view contemporary (artistic) society from a similar view point as Nordau, giving precis of the books' contents as statements of true fact: "By showing us the malady of certain writers and artists, Mr. Nordau has endeavoured to protect society itself, that is to say public health."<sup>100</sup> Conceding the book's doubtless controversial status, the articles nevertheless

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<sup>96</sup> Nordau, 1, 232.

<sup>97</sup> Marquis de Castellane, 'Dégénérescence', *Le Figaro*, 4 March 1894: "Littré avait le front fuyant du singe ; Mirbeau possédait une tête de sanglier ; Coppée a le regard d'une jeune fille et Leconte de Lisle un front immense : les qualifieriez-vous de dégénérés ?"

<sup>98</sup> René Doumic, 'Revue littéraire. Littérature et Dégénérescence', *La Revue des deux mondes*, 15 January 1894, 440-51, at 442-3.

<sup>99</sup> Doumic, 449. From an artistically conservative point of view, Doumic (446) also somewhat deflated Nordau's argument with regard to symbolist literature by stressing that Nordau credited Mallarmé and his followers with more influence than they actually wielded.

<sup>100</sup> The two short articles appeared in *Le Méneestrel* of 17 December 1893 (406) and of 18 March 1894 (87), in which issue the review of the première of *Thaïs* by Henri Moreno (alias Henri Heugel) also appeared (82-3). They were placed within the section entitled 'Nouvelles diverses. Paris et départements' and although they comported no signature, the column in the March 1894 issue is signed 'Henri Heugel, directeur-gérant'.

esteemed it a gripping read. Traditionally anti-Wagnerian, the journal also revelled in Nordau's 'medical' condemnation of Wagner.<sup>101</sup> René de Récy also referred to Nordau's monograph in his critique of the première of *Thaïs*. Récy ironically read the opera as a satire of "Wagnerism, Tolstoism, neo-Catholicism and other contemporary degeneracies methodically catalogued by M. Max Nordau" due to what he perceived as the opera's egotistical message—one should not risk one's own salvation for that of another—being diametrically opposed to the contemporary trend of redemption and altruism embodied in *Parsifal*.<sup>102</sup>

Nordau's opinion of Wagner was largely based on Wagner's libretti and theoretical writings. However, his music also came under attack due to what Nordau perceived as its false sense of religiosity, its unusual and indistinguishable form, its contrived motivic construction, its disjointed phraseology, its dissonance, its incessant chromatic modulation and its cacophonous orchestration which left the audience in a state of nervous exhaustion.<sup>103</sup> Thus Nordau saw Wagner and his cult as the worst case of degeneracy, diagnosing the symptoms of mysticism, delusions of grandeur, false philanthropy, anarchy, revolt, contradiction, incoherence and emotionalism, characterised by a mixture of religiosity and eroticism.<sup>104</sup> A similar mixture of religiosity and eroticism had been an aspect of Massenet's choice of dramatic subjects and composing style throughout his *œuvre*, as *Marie-Magdeleine*, *Eve*, *Hérodiade* and *Manon* testify. However, they seem nowhere better explored and developed than in his opera *Thaïs* which involved the staging of the lurid visions of a Church father and the espousal of certain aspects of the symbolist aesthetic, linked by their very nature to what was perceived as a feminised, decadent art. Influenced by advances in medical science and psychiatry, decadent and symbolist cultural products spoke a new language which stubborn positivists such as Nordau, caught in the web of rigid thought processes and the dogged quest for palpable knowledge, did not speak and could not comprehend.

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<sup>101</sup> Louis de Romain's *Médecin-Philosophe et Musicien-Poète: Etude sur Richard Wagner et Max Nordau* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1895) presented a defense of Wagner and Wagnerist ideals in the face of Nordau's critique.

<sup>102</sup> René de Récy, 'Chronique musicale. Opéra: *Thaïs*, comédie lyrique en trois actes. Musique de M. J. Massenet, poème de M. Louis Gallet, d'après le roman de M. Anatole France.', *La Revue bleue*, 24 March 1894, 375-7.

<sup>103</sup> Nordau, 1, 24-5.

Indeed, Nordau's attack on Wagner was doubly interesting in the context of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Le Cas Wagner*, first published in French in 1893.<sup>105</sup> Nordau's opinion of Wagner generally coincided with that of Nietzsche, although Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* was seen as far more impressive and erudite than Nordau's critique.<sup>106</sup> Nietzsche condemned the effeminacy of both Wagner's decadent art and the artist himself when he wrote of *Parsifal*:

Never [...] was there a man equally expert in [...] all that trembles and is effusive, all the feminisms from the *idioticon* of happiness! Drink, O my friends, the philters of this art! Nowhere will you find a more agreeable way of enervating your spirit, of forgetting your manhood under a rosebush.<sup>107</sup>

Just as the musical fabric of Massenet's opera was seen to be corrupt and the result of his own personal degeneration, so Wagner's musical dramas were perceived as a degenerate form of art by both Nietzsche and Nordau. Indeed, the French reception of Wagner was intimately bound up with the decadent and symbolist movements.<sup>108</sup> Both Baudelaire—he who was heralded as the father of the decadent literary movement—and Mallarmé produced influential pro-Wagnerist responses to Wagner's music and German metaphysics in general.<sup>109</sup> Many other figures of symbolist literary society were Wagnerists of the highest order and contributed to the *Revue wagnérienne*, founded in 1885 by Edouard Dujardin, including Teodor de Wyzewa, Edouard Schuré, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Verlaine and Huysmans.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the *Revue* became as much a mouthpiece for symbolist poetry as for the proselytism of Wagner's works.<sup>111</sup> The writers of this type of Wagnerist literature were generally scornful of Massenet, whose supposed superficiality and effeminacy

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<sup>104</sup> Nordau, 1, 305.

<sup>105</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le Cas Wagner*, trans. Daniel Halévy & Robert Dreyfus (Paris: Librairie Albert Schulz, 1893).

<sup>106</sup> Jacques Le Ridier, 'L'œuvre d'art totale comme symptôme de « dégénérescence » : Nordau, le wagnérisme français et Nietzsche', in Bechtel, Bourel & Le Ridier (eds.), *Max Nordau*, 69-77. Indeed, an English response to Nordau's diatribe (Anon., *Regeneration*, 230) remarked upon the fact that Nordau agreed with Nietzsche about Wagner but then went on to call Nietzsche an imbecile.

<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, 1967) 184, cited in Kramer, 280.

<sup>108</sup> See Erwin Koppen, *Dekadenter Wagnerismus: Studien zur europäischer Literatur des Fin de siècle* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973).

<sup>109</sup> For theoretical analysis of their texts, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>110</sup> Martine Kahane & Nicole Wild, *Wagner et la France* (Paris: Herscher, Bibliothèque nationale et Théâtre national de l'Opéra, 1983, 59-60).

<sup>111</sup> In a later article ('La Revue wagnérienne', *La Revue musicale*, 1 October 1923), Edouard Dujardin remarked of the *Revue*: "Du point de vue purement français, son œuvre a été, dans le grand mouvement poétique de 1886, là encore, de jeter des lumières; elle a été le trait d'union entre Wagner et Mallarmé, entre Schopenhauer et le symbolisme; elle a aidé les symbolistes de 1886 à prendre conscience de la profonde nécessité musicale qui s'imposait à eux!" Cited in Kahane & Wild, 60.

directly opposed him to Wagner.<sup>112</sup> And yet despite this hostility from Wagnerian critics, Massenet's operas *Esclarmonde* in 1889 and *Werther* in 1893, were received by the general Parisian press as Massenet's most Wagnerian works.<sup>113</sup>

A year later with *Thaïs*, it was not only Massenet and his music which became embroiled in the arguments over decadence and Wagnerism but also the opera's libretto. Anatole France chose to set his story for *Thaïs* in Alexandria, a fourth-century pleasure capital, a melting pot of nations, philosophies and beliefs of refined yet libertine morals.<sup>114</sup> The setting thus provided the infrastructure on which he based his 'conte philosophique',<sup>115</sup> first published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1889.<sup>116</sup> The year prior to the serialisation of *Thaïs*, Ernest Renan, France's self-appointed mentor, wrote in his *Drames philosophiques*:

Modern philosophy will have its ultimate expression as a drama, or rather an opera, because music and the illusions of the lyric stage will admirably serve as a continuation of reflection, just when words are no longer sufficient to express it.<sup>117</sup>

Renan's words seem to form a positive response to Wagnerian drama. By creating the opera *Thaïs*, therefore, Gallet and Massenet could be seen to be taking on board Renan's approval of opera as a continuation of philosophical thought, such as in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Thus, in the same way that Wagner's *œuvre* split the critics into two (or more) camps, so *Thaïs* proved controversial and was brought into the debate about decadence within artistic society. Indeed, all aspects of the opera *Thaïs*—the choice of a decadent novel; a subject combining mysticism, exoticism, religion and ecstasy; a scenario highlighting the dreamworld; the formal procedures of the libretto,

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<sup>112</sup> Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 164.

<sup>113</sup> Huebner, 103.

<sup>114</sup> Bancquart, 1318-9, 1328.

<sup>115</sup> Philosophical debate in the novel is showcased during the Platonic banquet scene, a literary device common in decadent stories which debated the philosophical syncretism of transitional epochs in civilisation. Louis Ménard's *Les Rêveries d'un païen mystique* of 1876 contained perhaps the forerunner of the genre. By the time Pierre Louÿs published his *Aphrodite* in 1896, the banquet scene was turned to derision by dilettante philosophers and the character of Timon who ironically debunked the intellectual exercise that both the debate and the scene of the debate/banquet presented. See the chapter entitled 'Le Dîner' in Pierre Louÿs's *Aphrodite*, Edition présentée, établie et annotée par Jean-Paul Goujon, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 183-99.

<sup>116</sup> The work was published as a novel by Calmann-Lévy in 1891. For publication details, see Bancquart, 1346-7. Although bearing the date 1891, the book's publication was announced on 1 November 1890 and criticisms of the novel in the press followed a week later.

<sup>117</sup> Ernest Renan, preface to his *Drames philosophiques*, in *Renan. Histoire et parole. Œuvres diverses*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1984), 680: "La philosophie moderne aura sa dernière expression dans un drame, ou plutôt dans un opéra ; car la musique et les allusions de la scène lyrique serviraient admirablement à continuer la pensée, au moment où la parole ne suffit plus à l'exprimer."

its preface and its press reception—must be seen through the wider optic of Wagnerian debate and the parallel yet intersecting criticism of decadence and degeneration in society at large.

### The Libretto

In Wagnerian spirit, and in line with increasingly common contemporary libretto-writing techniques, Gallet chose to compose his libretto in “prose rythmée” rather than in rhymed verse.<sup>118</sup> Gallet also wrote a preface to his libretto in which he theorised his use of language in a similar vein to the contemporaneous prefaces by Victor Wilder and Alfred Ernst to their respective translations of Wagner’s *Die Walküre*.<sup>119</sup> This preface was published in *Le Ménestrel* on 11 March 1894, less than a week before the opera’s première. Describing what had been dubbed ‘poésie mélique’, Gallet wrote:

It borrows certain rules from poetry; the hiatus is forbidden, sonority and harmony of words is sought after, number and rhythm are observed, it endeavours to contain ideas within the metrical boundaries; it is freed only from the absolute obligation to rhyme. Now and again, however, a rhyme is unexpectedly heard, as if to surprise and amuse the ear, without modifying the organisation of the musical construction.<sup>120</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the literary tradition of French ‘livrets’, stemming from the eighteenth-century operatic form of tragédie lyrique and the pre-eminence of its ‘poème’, was gradually whittled down. The development of a florid style of vocal writing during the first half of the nineteenth century, in which words were repeated, dislocated, inaudible and incomprehensible led to innumerable cases of libretti of empty rhetoric and formality. But also, as operatic music and theatrical and scenic techniques developed, became more suggestive and capable of expressing the drama on stage, the importance of the libretto was diminished and it was no longer

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<sup>118</sup> Jacques d’Offoël’s translated libretto for *L’Anneau du Niebelung*, (Paris, 1895, 64) was “en prose rythmée exactement adaptée au texte musical allemand.” See Jean-Louis Jam & Gérard Loubinoux, ‘D’une Walkyrie à l’autre... Querelles de traductions’, in Annegret Fauser & Manuela Schwarz (eds.), *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: Musik, Literatur, Kunst, Politik*, (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 401-30, at 407.

<sup>119</sup> Victor Wilder, *La Valkyrie* (1893); Alfred Ernst, *La Walkyrie*, (Paris, 1894). Details drawn from Jam & Loubinoux in Fauser & Schwarz (eds.), *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme*.

<sup>120</sup> Louis Gallet, ‘A propos de « Thaïs ». Poésie mélique’, *Le Ménestrel*, 11 March 1894, 73-5, at 74: “Il emprunte certains rigueurs à l’art poétique ; il s’interdit les hiatus, il recherche la sonorité et l’harmonie des mots ; il observe le nombre et le rythme ; il s’efforce de contenir l’idée dans les limites métriques ; il s’affranchit seulement de l’obligation absolue de la rime. De temps à autre, pourtant, une rime sonne, inattendue, comme pour surprendre et amuser l’oreille, sans modifier l’ordonnance de la construction musicale”. Cited by Alfred Bruneau, *Gil Blas*, 18 March 1894 and G. de Boisjolin in *L’Observateur français*, 18 March 1894.

admired for its purely literary content.<sup>121</sup> Thus grand-opera composers “played their part in a development which gradually eradicated all literary and formal qualities from librettos”: skilfully crafted verses and ordered metrical forms were reduced, by their musical settings, to prose-like fragments in order to enhance the overall dramatic setting.<sup>122</sup> Eighteenth-century *tragédie lyrique*, from Rameau through to Gluck, had been founded on a declamation in which the metrical procedures of the text were faithfully echoed by those of the music.<sup>123</sup> But by the mid-nineteenth century, Saint-Saëns saw a need to “wrench lyrical drama from the tyranny of routine and singers, in order to turn it into grand modern drama.”<sup>124</sup> Saint-Saëns believed Wagner to have conceived a new form of lyrical drama which struck a balance between the importance of the libretto, the dramatic action and truly symphonic music.<sup>125</sup> However, his appreciation of Wagner’s operas petered out as he perceived the drama to have been replaced by a “strange phraseology and a philosophical pretension” whose significance completely escaped him.<sup>126</sup> In France, Saint-Saëns believed Gounod to have revived the earlier tradition and melodic respect of the text, only spoilt somewhat by the success of Offenbach’s operettas, with what Saint-Saëns perceived as their French words set to German metrical patterns.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, it was to Offenbach’s infamous ‘mis-settings’ of French that Gallet referred when outlining the motivation behind his adoption of ‘poésie mélodique’ for *Thaïs* as follows:

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<sup>121</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 145-8, 326-7. The Romantic aesthetic of the artistic genius, cultivated by Wagner, developed the ideal of the musician-creator, the cult of the composer whose music alone could convey dramatic sentiment. Wagner’s theoretical writings, particularly on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, also turned opinion in France regarding libretti written by composers themselves, thereafter considered as possessing higher aesthetic worth than the work of professional librettists. The practice of dimming house lights during opera performance, also promoted by Wagner and his house at Bayreuth, rendered the simultaneous reading of printed libretti impossible. Hence, the visual, pantomimic and musical presentation of the drama gained importance, having to provide sufficient explication of the plot to unprepared audiences.

<sup>122</sup> Gerhard, 322.

<sup>123</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et Mélodie*, Troisième édition, (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 46 & 261.

<sup>124</sup> Remarkd in relation to Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, Saint-Saëns, ix: “arracher le drame lyrique à la tyrannie de la routine et des chanteurs, pour en faire le grand drame moderne.”

<sup>125</sup> Saint-Saëns, 47: Saint-Saëns wrote: “[Il] a pensé qu’une nouvelle forme de drame lyrique, où la musique ne violenterait pas le vers et ne ferait pas attendre l’action à la porte ; où la symphonie, avec tous ses développements modernes, rendrait à la musique ce qu’elle aurait pu perdre ; en abdiquant au profit du drame une partie de ses prérogatives, serait plus digne que la forme actuellement en usage d’un public intelligent et éclairé.”

<sup>126</sup> Saint-Saëns, x-xi: “après avoir supprimé l’un après l’autre, tous les moyens de paire qu’avait à sa disposition l’opéra, pour laisser la place, libre au drame, Wagner a supprimé le drame et l’a remplacé par une phraséologie bizarre et une prétendue philosophique dont la portée m’échappe complètement.”

Very few composers have a literary instinct that is comprehensive enough, delicate enough to respect absolutely the poetic text; it is to their very arbitrary, exclusive, even selfish composition process, to their natural bias not to adhere to the pure literary form, but to reshape it, deform it, without regard for the rules, in order to juxtapose it against the contours of their music that we owe so much bad poetry in opera libretti, so many monstrous adaptations of which a few have acquired the notoriety of ridicule.<sup>128</sup>

Antedating the composer Alfred Bruneau's and Emile Zola's public theorising on libretto writing and operatic treatment in relation to their opera *Messidor* (1897), Gallet backed up his own opinions by citing two 'authorities': Jules Combarieu's thesis of 1894, *Les Rapports de la musique et de la poésie* and, more controversially, remarks by François-Auguste Gevaert, the director of the Brussels Conservatoire and specialist of the music of Antiquity.<sup>129</sup> Apparently, Gallet and Gevaert had dined together twenty years previously and discussed their ideas on unrhymed verse. Hugh Macdonald situates this meeting in the year 1868 and suggests that Charles Gounod may also have participated in the debate.<sup>130</sup> For in 1874, twenty years before Gallet's preface, Gounod wrote and published a preface for his unpublished and unfinished opera *George Dandin*, composed to Molière's original prose.<sup>131</sup> In fact professing Wagner-influenced ideals on the composition of operas and libretti, Gallet cagily avoided quoting the controversial *maître* himself, justifying his technique by citing Gevaert:

Following Wagner, musicians have unanimously abandoned symmetrical, four-square melody. Nothing could be more ridiculous, therefore, than to maintain a rhythmic repercussion in the text which no longer has any relation in the melody!<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Saint-Saëns, 262-3.

<sup>128</sup> See Gallet's preface in *Le Ménestrel*, 73: "Très peu de compositeurs ont un sens littéraire assez complet, assez délicat pour garder le respect absolu du texte poétique ; c'est à leur procédé de composition très arbitraire, très exclusif, très égoïste enfin, à leur parti pris de ne pas épouser la forme littéraire pure, mais de la repétrir, de la déformer, sans souci des règles, pour la juxtaposer exactement aux contours de leur musique, que l'on doit dans les livrets d'opéra tant de mauvais vers, tant de monstrueuses adaptations, dont quelques-unes ont acquis la célébrité du ridicule." Cited by Martin, *L'Estafette*, 18 March 1894 and Bertal, *Le Rappel*, 18 March 1894. Gallet was, in fact, paraphrasing Saint-Saëns's 'La Poésie et la Musique', 257-66, at 260.

<sup>129</sup> Hugh Macdonald, 'The prose libretto', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1, 2 (July 1989), 155-166, at 160. For a succinct review of the issue of the prose libretto at the time of the *Thaïs* première, see Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 135-9. See also James Ross, *Crisis and Transformation: French Opera, Politics and the Press, 1897-1903*, 2, Doctoral thesis (Oxford, 1998), 240.

<sup>130</sup> Macdonald, 163.

<sup>131</sup> André Corneau, in *Le Jour* of 18 March 1894 cites a lengthy passage from Gounod's published preface to *George Dandin*.

<sup>132</sup> Louis Gallet, 75: "Les musiciens ont unanimement abandonné, à la suite de Wagner, la mélodie carrée, symétrique. Quoi de plus absurde que de maintenir dans le texte une répercussion rythmique qui n'a plus de correspondance dans la mélodie !" Approximate citations of Gevaert are to be found in Joncières, *La Liberté*, 18 March 1894 and Weber's article in *Le Temps* of 9 April 1894 which was



The critics saw through his ruse, however, and anti-Wagnerian criticism was vociferous. Indeed, later, Saint-Saëns, to whom Gallet's preface owed much, being in complete accord with Saint-Saëns's ideas on poetry and music, noted the Wagnerian colour of the press reception of the *Thaïs* libretto.<sup>133</sup> Johannes Weber was outraged at what he considered Gallet's amateurism. He pointed out that to resolve the problems raised by Gallet (as mentioned above), a librettist needed also to be an erudite musician. That Gallet was not such a librettist was proved for Weber by his reliance on Gevaert's opinions.<sup>134</sup> Weber insisted that melody could not exist without rhythm which, in turn, demanded a certain regularity. Therefore, even Wagner's melody could not have abandoned this regularity of symmetry, and thus Gevaert's opinion was complete nonsense.<sup>135</sup> Weber nevertheless continued the recurrent idea in Wagner reception since François-Joseph Fétis's influential study, in *La Revue et Gazette musicale* during the summer of 1852, of aesthetic realism that endangered (Italianate) melody in favour of declamation.<sup>136</sup> Yet modern, Wagnerian-influenced declamation tended not to be considered in the same light as that associated with eighteenth-century tragédie lyrique. Weber referred to young French (and Russian) composers who abusively exploited lyrical declamation that risked, in his opinion,

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blatantly titled 'Le manifeste néo-wagnérien de M. Louis Gallet à propos de *Thaïs*; une erreur de M. Gevaert [*sic*]; les embarras de M. Massenet.' See also Macdonald, 160.

<sup>133</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Ecole Buissonnière. Notes et Souvenirs*, (Paris: Pierre Lafitte, 1913), 67-8:

"Sous prétexte de Wagnérisme, les théories les plus folles, les assertions les plus extravagantes étaient, dans la critique musicale, d'un usage courant. Esprit pondéré, caractère indépendant, Gallet ne pouvait hurler avec les loups; [...] sans lui tenir compte d'une tenue littéraire bien rare chez les librettistes, on accueillait chacun de ses ouvrages avec une hostilité dépourvue de toute indulgence et de toute justice. [...] Le vers blanc qu'il a employé dans *Thaïs* avec un tel souci de l'harmonie et de la couleur, comptant sur la musique des sons pour remplacer celle de la rime, ce vers délivré de l'assonance et affranchi des banalités qu'elle traîne après elle dans les opéras, mais conservant des qualités de rythme et de sonorité qui l'éloignent de la prose, ne fut pas apprécié."

<sup>134</sup> Saint-Saëns pleaded for a similar empathy between poets and composers in 'La Poésie et la Musique' (1885, 264) but, as shown by his later comments, obviously believed Gallet musician enough, or at least an astute enough poet, to provide Massenet with a libretto sympathetic to musical concerns. Weber, however, piqued by Gallet's 'accusation' of musicians who did not absolutely respect their texts, neatly reversed Gallet's text as follows: "Très peu de littérateurs ont un sens musicale assez complet, assez délicat pour garder le respect de l'art qu'ils prennent pour l'auxiliaire. C'est à leurs procédés de faire des textes versifiés ou non, mais procédés très arbitraires, très exclusifs, très égoïstes, que sont dus tant de poèmes qui ont entraîné les partitions dans leurs chutes." ["Very few writers have a musical instinct that is comprehensive enough, delicate enough to respect the art that they take as auxiliary. It is to their very arbitrary, exclusive, even selfish process of writing rhymed or non-rhymed texts that we owe so many poems that have dragged scores down with them."]

<sup>135</sup> Joncières added that it was only the musical periods that were changed in Wagner's and Wagnerian melody, and that those periods remained symmetrical in their relation to one another.

<sup>136</sup> See Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: 'La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris', 1834-1880*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 206-18. See also her 'Wagnerism and Anti-Wagnerism in the Paris Periodical Press, 1852-1870', in Fauser & Schwarz (eds.), 51-83, in which Ellis diagnoses Fétis's influence on a succeeding generation of French critics.

annihilating melody in opera altogether.<sup>137</sup> One of the most prominent of these composers at that time was Alfred Bruneau, Massenet's former pupil and the composer of *Le Rêve* (1891) and *L'Attaque du moulin* (1893), with libretti by Louis Gallet of a freer structural nature than Gallet's earlier libretti.<sup>138</sup> Bruneau defined his operas as musical dramas "not at all written in prose but where the prosaic qualities of modern life was blended with legendary mysticism", that degeneration of human and artistic reason according to Nordau.<sup>139</sup> Recalling the debate previously instigated by Emile Zola, from whose novels Gallet's libretti for Bruneau were drawn, as well as a press enquiry at the time of the première of *Le Rêve*,<sup>140</sup> Bruneau outlined what he saw as the ideal for renewal of opera construction.<sup>141</sup> Attracted by the naturalist dramas of Emile Zola, Bruneau attempted to revolutionise opera by injecting it with 'realistic' musical declamation in tandem with a freedom of poetic expression. This naturalistic definition of declamation, therefore, was still bound up with respect for the text, but with regard to the content and sentiments conveyed by it rather than concern for its metrical form. Bruneau's view of opera was to be employed and developed in different ways in Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* (1900) and Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) but found only slight resonance in Gallet's and Massenet's new opera.

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<sup>137</sup> This argument of 'melody versus declamation' resonates in the 'Latin versus Germanic', 'melody versus harmony', metaphysic 'clarity versus obscurity' debates in musical writings from the eighteenth century onwards which often featured distinctive pairings of composers such as 'Piccini versus Gluck', 'Rossini versus Weber', and then almost any major French or Italian opera composer versus Wagner during the second half of the nineteenth century. See, for example, Stendhal (*Vie de Rossini* and *Vies de Haydn, Mozart et Métastase*) and Saint-Saëns (*Harmonie et Mélodie* and *Portraits et Souvenirs*).

<sup>138</sup> See Huebner's chapter on *L'Attaque du Moulin* in *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 412-25. Bruneau was a defender of Wagner's music in his *Musique d'hier et de demain* (1900), noting its superior reason, rigor and logic. However, he distanced his appreciation from what he defined as its overtly Germanic elements. See Jane F. Fulcher, 'Wagner in the Cultural Politics of the French Right and Left before World War I', in Fauser & Schwarz (eds.), 137-54, at 149-50.

<sup>139</sup> See Bruneau, *Gil Blas*, 18 March 1894.

<sup>140</sup> Gallet, in his preface to *Thaïs*, refers to a recent press enquiry regarding the prose libretto which Hugh Macdonald was unable to trace in his article on the subject. Gallet is, in fact referring to the 'enquête', following the première of *Le Rêve* in 1891, by Léon Baron, 'L'Opéra en Prose', *Le Figaro*, 8 July 1891, in which Massenet expresses his views on the possibilities afforded to the musician by the prose libretto: "il faudra que la prose employée soit châtiée, épurée, de choix, de la prose *exprès*, enfin, dont certains mots difficiles ou vulgaires devront être rigoureusement exclus. [...] Dans une belle prose il y a des formes de phrases, des épithètes, qui prêtent d'elles-mêmes aux progressions musicales. [...] il me semble que l'adoption de la prose pour le livret d'opéra [...] est une sorte de corollaire de la transformation que subit en ce moment la musique; la déclamation lyrique qui s'impose de plus en plus s'en accommodera bien, je le crois. [...] Aujourd'hui il faut marcher, marcher de l'avant et rompre avec des procédés surannés. Plus d'entraves, telle doit être notre devise — mais toujours du bon sens!"

Bruneau expressed his disappointment regarding the result of Gallet's potentially ground-breaking libretto—it was deemed degenerate by not only traditionalist voices but also by the artistic avant-garde—but he still appreciated any small change (i.e. the suppression of rhyme) to rigid operatic convention.<sup>142</sup> It was exactly this confused and disappointed expectation of rhyme that led others to condemn Gallet's work.<sup>143</sup> Léon Kerst was thoroughly indignant about Gallet's pretension to innovation that amounted to very little. Mockingly pointing out the gulf between Gallet's intentions and the resulting libretto, Kerst condemned Gallet's attempt at originality as unsuccessful and half-hearted.<sup>144</sup> Half-measures, Gallet's maintenance of poetic rhythm and all those aspects of poetry which implied the use of rhyme that was invariably absent, merely frustrated the listener.<sup>145</sup> More guarded reviews took their lead from Gallet's preface, rejoicing in the removal of uninspired, forced and misplaced rhymes in opera.<sup>146</sup> Others identified with a more Gounod-influenced point of view, with what Macdonald describes as one current of thought that wished to dispense with conventional verse to allow composers greater independence of phrase length (by avoiding rhyme) and of rhythm (by avoiding metre).<sup>147</sup> Thus both Henry Bauër and André Corneau shifted the emphasis of their reviews onto the composer: Gallet's libretto allowed Massenet to colour phrases, to communicate through music that which the text was unable to.<sup>148</sup> Massenet's music, therefore, played the role foreseen by the positivist yet visionary Ernest Renan: it was a non-logocentric language capable of a level of expression that went beyond that of words.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> See Bruneau.

<sup>142</sup> See Bruneau. Both Bauër, *L'Echo de Paris*, 18 March 1894 and Jullien, *Le Journal des débats*, 17 March 1894 denounced the importance placed upon this detail, affirming that the Opéra public had not been able to distinguish the use or lack of rhyme anyway.

<sup>143</sup> See Ginisty, *Le Petit Parisien*, 17 March 1894 and the unsigned article in *La Lanterne*, 17 March 1894.

<sup>144</sup> Kerst, *Le Petit Journal*, 17 March 1894.

<sup>145</sup> Mirliton, 'Soirée parisienne: *Thaïs*', *L'Événement*, 17 March 1894: "cette forme étrange de vers qui n'en sont pas, où la césure est maintenue, où la rime manque. Il fallait courageusement faire de la prose [...], supprimant la césure en même temps que la rime; cela eût été tout aussi poétique."

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, Régnier (*Le Journal*).

<sup>147</sup> Macdonald, 165.

<sup>148</sup> Huebner provides examples of the way in which Massenet manipulated Gallet's blank verse in *Thaïs* in his *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 142-8.

## **In Conclusion**

At the end of the nineteenth century in France, the dream world was a realm for the exploration of decadence. Indeed, it was a signifier of degeneracy for, informed by medical science and positivist philosophy, the unconscious was viewed by wider society as a dangerous domain which allowed individuals false identification with the 'other' through the suppression of the (male) regulators of reason. And yet, with the rise of the decadent and symbolist aesthetics, this foray into the feminised region of one's own unconscious was idealised as an enriching, desirable and creative process, as an alternative life experience to that of the increasingly materialistic and scientific society of the 'outside', real world. As women, such as Hubertine Auclert, harnessed the principles of republican ideology to claim new rights on their own behalf, male artists of the avant-garde resigned and retired from republican society with the desire to occupy a sphere traditionally reserved for women: the interior, whether physical or mental. This feminised identification of the male self was not, as one might surmise, translated by a preoccupation with things natural, but rather with artificial pleasures and new, refined, 'perverted' sensations. The nineteenth century, with its social and sexual taboos, saw a huge rise of interest in and study of the erotic imagination which was often examined in a medical context/pretext. The diagnoses of doctors and researchers were then applied to society by moralists in an effort to sanitise the corrupt and polluting effect of its decadent elements.

These two currents created an ideological split at the end of the nineteenth century between those who rejected the teachings of positivism and science to revel in the intricacies of the human mind and nature, including its (sexual) 'perversion', and those who pursued a reasoned and sometimes rudimentary scientific course for the advancement of a healthy nation. Both these groups, however, necessarily viewed modern society as part of an evolutionary trajectory in which decline had set in; society was divided into those who accepted and embraced its degeneracy and those who fought against it. The seductiveness of the decadent aesthetic, however, was betrayed by an ambiguous sentiment on behalf of the majority of the French population which at the same time both admired and rejected social and cultural elements and products deemed decadent. The most obvious manifestation of this type

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<sup>149</sup> This notion of musical semantics will be discussed in the following chapter.

of feeling was the *fin de siècle*'s relationship with the new woman (which will be explored further in chapter four): her emancipation—and thus her perceived sexual liberation—rendered her both sexually attractive and socially decadent, and whilst desired, she was spurned.

Indeed, the ambivalence of the public's relationship with either liberated woman or decadent figures such as Hérode may inform us of a possible divide between critical and public reception. Whilst the critical press tended to take a moralising tone over decadent cultural products which displayed the more 'base' sentiments of human nature, it was, nevertheless, to these elements that they, along with the public, were drawn. Vernon Rosario notes the intricacy and problematic nature of dealing with the collective erotic imagination because of its subtle narrative intertwining of facts, experience and fantasies of individuals. Those people attracted to the individual erotic imagination, or a fiction/history based upon it, thus experience pleasure from sexual titillation and/or the history of perversion. During the nineteenth century in particular, the medical 'discovery' and manipulation of the erotic imagination possessed enormous political and social impact. Due to the legitimacy conferred by medicine, the erotic could escape the confines of the individual imagination and lust could become an attractive issue of cultural politics.<sup>150</sup> In doing so, society's moralising forces—the Church, and the most powerful tool of auto-critique, the press—seized upon the (often repressed) nature of the private individual (which had become a legitimate cultural phenomenon) as a subject to study, quantify, categorise and condemn.

In *Hérodiade*, Massenet and his librettists began to explore the notions of decadence and social pollution. They did so by portraying the seductive and erotic nature of Hérode's lifestyle which, in turn, seduce their audience. However, their depiction is not without moralistic value, for Hérode's decadence can be viewed as a corrupting influence on his marriage, his political objectives and his personal happiness. The press reception of the opera, however, scarcely dealt with decadence, and Hérode's characterisation slips by almost unnoticed by critics much more concerned with the theatrical representation of a bible story and its irreverent and blasphemous portrayal

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<sup>150</sup> Rosario, 17-8.

of the first Christian martyr. In the critical imagination at the start of 1882, it was the perversion of Christian history that was viewed as inadmissible and decadent rather than an (artistic) society already capable of producing 'degenerate' products.

By the time Gallet and Massenet mounted *Thaïs*, the cultural climate had changed. In 1894, Massenet and Gallet set what had quickly become a classic of decadent literature. The philosophical pretensions of France's novel, reinforced by his letter to *Le Figaro* on the eve of the opera's première, and Gallet's choice of 'prose mélique' for his libretto, to which he adjoined an explicative preface, were elements which could only be viewed at the end of the nineteenth century in terms of Wagnerism. The musical conception of the work, in which programmatic symphonic music played an integral part of the drama, also related Massenet's work to those of Wagner in the informed public imagination. As Wagnerism, decadence and symbolism had been intimately linked from the mid-1880s onwards, the opera *Thaïs* was immediately branded a decadent cultural product. This notion was reinforced by the opera's concentration on the often scantily-clad female body, and particularly that of *Thaïs*, which, nevertheless, made the work a 'succès de scandale'. It was, however, a double-edged sword: the transferral of a 'lesser art' to the Opéra stage confirmed the corrupt nature of the librettist's and composer's art in the eyes of the critics. Yet the concentration on the body went further than mere spectacle, for the scenario was designed with mimed and danced episodes in which the communicative emphasis was shifted away from the libretto to the visual stage action, forming part of an artistic movement which reflected the findings of modern psychiatry/psychoanalysis. The nation's foremost, but perhaps most traditional, lyric stage had opened its doors to *Thaïs*, yet witnessed a work which troubled its hallowed and conventional halls. This 'crime' did not go unpunished for the opera underwent subsequent heavy revisions before its Opéra revival in 1898, and the innovative but controversial *Ballet de la Tentation* and the *Symphonie des amours d'Aphrodite* were cut. Thus the 'establishment' sanctioned the decadent elements—both spectacular and formal—of an opera which was a product of its symbolist era and which played upon wider society's ambivalent attraction to and rejection of decadence.

## Chapter Four

### *La Pornocratie*

With the deaths of Ernest Renan (1892) and Hippolyte Taine (1893), the positivist ethic, along with hope placed in science and progress, was seen to be waning.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the 1890s saw republicanism and mainstream Catholicism move closer together. The Catholic Church encouraged its members towards a more social form of Catholicism (*Rerum novarum*, 1891) and to an acceptance of civil authority in order to better defend religious interests (*Inter sollicitudines*, 1892). This *ralliement*, instigated by the encyclicals of the Pope Leo XIII, was accompanied by the broad development of mystical forms of worship, as discussed in chapter one.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, positivism was undermined by the notions of decadence, national decline and a general interest in the mystical as a rejection of the scientific.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as Catholics were encouraged to accept the lay Republic, not only were congregations throughout France enjoying mystical forms of devotion but also wider, lay society witnessed what has become known as the mystic revival. Decadent artists were very much concerned with mysticism, both Catholic and otherwise. A whole range of esoteric cults gained new popularity: Edouard Schuré's *Les Grands initiés*, published in 1889, reviewed the doctrines and philosophies of Krishna, Moses, Pythagoras, Plato and Jesus (among others),<sup>4</sup> whilst Buddhism, theosophical movements and Rosicrucianism gained unprecedented support.<sup>5</sup> Thus, whilst Christian dogma,

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Les débuts de la III<sup>e</sup> république 1871-1898* (Paris: Le Seuil, Collection Points histoire, 1973), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Harris (*Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Viking, 1999), 275) identifies Catholic approval of and adherence to the *ralliement* as less than whole-hearted prior to the Dreyfus Affair. Following Leo XIII's death in 1903, the initiative was in ruins. She also points out how the *ralliement* was rejected by certain right-wing and harshly anti-Semitic factions of Catholicism, such as the Assumptionists, in favour of a more militant political action. Thus, any 'reconciliation' between the lay and Catholic groups within society seems to have been short lived.

<sup>3</sup> Mona Ozouf (*L'Ecole, L'Eglise et la République 1871-1914* (Paris: Editions Cana/Jean Offredo, Collection Seuil Points Histoire, 1982), 169) refers to Ferdinand Brunetière's influential denunciation of science in *La Revue des deux mondes*, 1 January 1895.

<sup>4</sup> Edouard Schuré, *Les Grands initiés* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin), 1960. Schuré (16) defined the esoteric tradition as the "history of the eternal and universal religion".

<sup>5</sup> The *Ordre de la Rose & Croix du Temple et du Graal* had a particular influence on the artistic community. Founded by Stanislas de Guaita, Papus (alias Gérard Encausse) and Sâr Joséphin Péladan in 1888, the movement was dedicated to meditation, to the study of major occultist currents—for example Gnosticism and cabbalism—and to spiritual communion with the divine being. The occultist, novelist, playwright, essayist, philosopher, religious historian and art critic Joséphin Péladan applied his spiritualist erudition in all the areas of his activity and directly influenced artistic circles, both literary (through his own writings) and fine art, by his organisation of Rose & Croix salons from 1892-1897. On the other hand, artistic products, and particularly Wagner's *Parsifal* helped shape Péladan's

philosophy and morality were unfashionable, Christian ritual, spectacle and ascetism were fully exploited.<sup>6</sup> When projected onto women, the masochistic sensuality of Christian self-sacrifice was often viewed as a form of eroticism, but was also one which can more often be perceived as a type of pornography. This rather perverse eroticisation of Christianity was popular and was portrayed as superseding exhausted pagan pleasures in decadent culture.<sup>7</sup>

Within this aesthetic, stereotypical characterisations of women *à la* Michelet as either the naïve clerical devotee (such as Salomé) or the wanton fury (such as Hérodiade) were no longer distinct. A female figure combining the two former models emerged from the male imagination: the threatening sexual emancipation of the Hérodiade-like 'new woman' and the disagreeable clericalism of the Salomé-like Christian woman were sublimated in the image of the sensual, mystical and ecstatic hysteric. This conflation was made possible through fin-de-siècle medical study of, particularly female, hysteria which defined the height of hysterical seizure as ecstasy, and implied both sexual and mystical qualifications of the transported state. The influence of Proudhon's *La Pornocratie*, posthumously published in 1875, was felt throughout the Third Republic. The title of Proudhon's book was formed from the Greek *pornê*, meaning prostitute, and *kratos*, meaning authority. For Proudhon, a prostitute was any woman who did not conform to his sense of social justice, marital submission and female modesty. Indeed, all women who sought social, political or intellectual emancipation from men could be classed as prostitutes in Proudhon's system, including Juliette Lamber and Jenny d'Héricourt, the two intelligent women who fought for women's rights and to whom Proudhon's book was addressed. Proudhon imagined and condemned a world in which this type of woman would usurp men's power and authority in all domains. Proudhon's nightmare was,

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mystical beliefs and cult of the Holy Grail: the year the Rose-Croix was founded, Péladan went on pilgrimage to Bayreuth and saw *Parsifal* three times. See Michèle Besnard-Coursodon, 'Nimroud ou Orphée : Joséphin Péladan et la société décadente', *Romantisme – Décadence*, 42, 1983, 119-36; Michel Cadot, 'Un ardent wagnérien : Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918)', in Annegret Fauser & Manuela Schwarz (eds.), *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: Musik, Literatur, Kunst, Politik* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 475-83; Jean Da Silva, *Le salon de la Rose-Croix (1892-1897)* (Paris: Editions Syros-Alternatives, 1991), 45-6.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Pierrot, *L'imaginaire décadent 1880-1900* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977), 110-2.

<sup>7</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, 'Introduction', *Romantisme – Décadence*, 42, 1983, 3-8, at 5.



however, far from realised, and male Third-Republican society developed ways in which to deal with and to neutralise the harmful effects of this new woman.

The conflation of emancipated woman and immoral woman inherent in Proudhon's monograph was by no means new, but now it served as a way to condemn morally those women who desired nothing more than social and political equality with men (at the very most). However, this image of women, combined with that of the sensual mystic, was an attractive one to fin-de-siècle artists and writers who were drawn to the sexually potent woman but repulsed by her self-centered emancipation. Thus symbolist artistic society, as well as society at large, created ways in which to tame those characteristics which threatened the status quo of gender politics. They did so by using formulas, or frames, to enclose female sexuality within natural, rational, medical, Catholic and traditional norms of what was deemed suitable behaviour for women. The separation created by these frames restored a balance of power in favour of men, although women still seemed to be able to escape from them in moments of direct and unrestrained expression and emotion.<sup>8</sup> In this way, sensual mystics were medically classed as hysterics and their sexual (and titillating) elation classed as seizure; the appropriately named *femme fatale*, who had the power to destroy the male victim of her seduction, was neutralised by her own death or her assimilation into another category which could be positivistically catalogued or controlled. *Thaïs*, the sexually and socially emancipated mystical prostitute was thus seemingly brought under (male) control by her conversion to the patriarchal Christian religion and her death in a state of mystical/hysterical ecstasy.

In this way, society created new forms for the 'containment' of women and the character traits they were perceived to possess. Whether due to their religiosity, or to their growing emancipation and assertion as social individuals—through Code reforms, greater access to education and employment, the suffrage movement, changing social and sexual mores—women were seen as a threat to male order and reason, and perhaps even more so in the 1890s than in the wake of the events of 1870/1. This growing sense of unease with the changing sexual politics, with *pornocratie*, was reflected in (male) artistic creation and dealt with by a 'framing'

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Ann Smart, 'The Silencing of Lucia', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 4, 2 (July 1992), 119-41, at 121.

and neutralising of those aspects of female behaviour deemed disturbing. Whilst Massenet's opera *Hérodiade* dealt with Hérode's sexual ecstasy, *Thaïs* treats the notion of the female *extasiée*: the decadent image of woman as both sexually potent and yet as an adept of Christian mysticism. The following chapter will thus examine the factors and trends which made such artistic characterisations possible, and analyse how they are developed, both scenically and musically, in *Thaïs*. The evolving portrayal of women characters from *Hérodiade* to *Thaïs* is viewed in contrast to the consistency of the anticlerical portrait drawn of fallen holy men in the two operas: Athanaël is a close cousin of Jean Baptiste.

### *Femme Fatale* and Ecstatic Mystic

In *fin-de-siècle* art, the characters of the *femme fatale* and ecstatic mystic were sometimes distinct but more often combined. The image of the diabolical *femme fatale* accentuated her predatory sexual behaviour, whilst the portrayal of the mystical ecstatic involved the framing of women's sexuality with a (Christian) mystical experience; both betrayed misogynist feeling.<sup>9</sup> Mystical and sexual *jouissance* for women had been interpreted as synonymous throughout history, but never more so than in elitist decadent circles.<sup>10</sup> The German painter Albert von Keller was reported to have believed that the painful facial expressions of dead and dying women could be compared to those women 'in love to the point of ecstasy'. Thus Keller implied that virtuous passivity, sacrificial ecstasy and erotic death were the ultimate feminine fulfilment.<sup>11</sup> The work of the prolific and influential artist Félicien Rops also betrayed an obsession for religious eroticism. His *La Tentation de saint Antoine* portrayed a resplendent, naked blonde woman tied to a cross, a familiar

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Mireille Dottin-Orsini (*Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale: textes et images de la misogynie fin-de-siècle* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993), 23) identifies misogyny as the basis of all artistic expression at the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Gianlorenzo Bernini's mid-seventeenth-century sculpture of Saint Teresa of Ávila in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. Saint Teresa's religious ecstasy was there portrayed "with legs akimbo, billowing habit disarrayed, eyes shut, mouth open, and head thrown back" while a knowing Cupid-like figure pointed his (phallic) spear at the Saint: Bernini shows Saint Teresa's mystical union as sexual, as ecstatic orgasm. See Corinne E. Blackmer, 'The Ecstasies of Saint Teresa: The Saint as Queer Diva from Crawshaw to *Four Saints in Three Acts*', in Corinne E. Blackmer & Patricia Juliana Smith (eds.), *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 306-47, at 306-8.

<sup>11</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 54-6. In this context, Dijkstra also refers to the work of the French painter Paul-Albert Besnard and the Belgian Fernand Khnopff.

figure in decadent art.<sup>12</sup> The woman is here depicted as aroused by her torture and as the diabolical object of Saint Anthony's gaze. Yet the *fin-de-siècle* equation of sexual and spiritual fulfilment for women also allows the spectator to interpret the woman's arousal as religious fervour: almost any expression of women's religiosity could thus be construed as related to their sexuality (and vice versa). Indeed, with his illustrations for many *fin-de-siècle*, decadent novels, Rops created some of his most morbid, sadistic, misogynistic and (in the eyes of some) erotically voyeuristic pieces.<sup>13</sup>

Real-life displays of 'excessive' female sexuality were similarly framed, but largely within the medical realm of hysteria. Hysterical, mystical and sexual ecstasy were intimately linked in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital, and through his prominent research hysteria became identified as a distinctly 'female malady'.<sup>14</sup> Charcot's methods of treatment of women hysterics were somewhat unorthodox. Possessing a keen sense of observation and a special interest in art history, Charcot, aided by the artist and sculptor Paul Richer, compiled an exhaustive inventory of fine-art pathological images from 1880 onwards, considering them as documentary evidence of mental illness.<sup>15</sup> Together, they established the annual

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<sup>12</sup> Dijkstra, 34. Pierre Louÿs's novel *Aphrodite* contains a horrifyingly graphic crucifixion scene of a young female slave that was retained in Camille Erlanger's 1906 opera based on Louÿs's novel. In Rops's *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, the horrified saint is looking up at the cross, from behind which a red-caped devil is poking his diabolical tongue out at Anthony and holding in his arms the crucified and rigid Christ with arms outstretched, as if the devil has just taken the figure of Jesus down from the cross and replaced him with the naked woman. The devil has apparently also replaced the sign bearing the inscription INRI at the head of the cross with one reading EROS. The saint's companion pig is not excluded from this image and stands behind the foot of the cross, looking up at the woman. (See *Félicien Rops, 1833-1898. Aquarelles, dessins, gravures* (Centre culturel de la Communauté française de Belgique, 25 janvier-2 mars 1980), 53.) In *L'Organiste du diable ou sainte Cécile*, Rops even went as far as to depict the well-loved patron saint of music naked with her long hair flying out behind her, sat at an organ of which the seven pipes are huge phalluses. See Eduard Fuchs, *Das erotische Element in der Karikatur, Der Karikatur der europäischen Völker*, 3 (Berlin: Hofmann, 1904), 233.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Rops's 1884 frontispiece for a volume of Sâr Joséphin Péladan's *La Décadence latine* series entitled *La Vice suprême. Etudes passionnelles de décadence*, one of four frontispieces Rops designed for Péladan between 1884 and 1888. (See *Félicien Rops, 1833-1898. Aquarelles, dessins, gravures*, 70.) Here Rops depicted a woman skeleton stood in a coffin and dressed in a tight dress and white petticoat but, nevertheless, with what pass for her breasts (two half spheres attached to the skeleton with string) bare. See also Gustave Kahn, *Das Weib in der Karikatur Frankreichs* (Stuttgart: Hermann Schmidts Verlag, 1907), 161.

<sup>14</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1998). (Originally published New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.)

<sup>15</sup> Debora L. Silverman, *Art nouveau in fin-de-siècle France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1989), 94-7. Approaching the subject from the contemporary Catholic and clerical point of view, Ruth Harris (327) describes Charcot's and Richer's publications as "showing how the saints and martyrs of past ages were nothing more than neurotics who could now be treated".

publication of *Nouvelle iconographie de la Salpêtrière: clinique des maladies du système nerveux* in 1888, and the products of Charcot's technically-advanced photographic studio were published in three volumes as *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*. Taking into account the weekly 'séances' and public lectures at the Salpêtrière, it can be seen that Charcot's patients were subjected to incessant observation, and that the hospital became an environment in which female hysteria was continuously presented, represented, and reproduced.<sup>16</sup> Charcot's publications accompanied the illustrations with captions to explain the poses struck by the patients, reinforcing his interpretation of hysteria as explicitly linked to female sexuality.<sup>17</sup> A recurrent posture of female hysterics represented was one of 'extase'. A series of photographs from 1878 of a young patient called Augustine in the third stages of hysterical seizure, dubbed 'attitudes passionnelles', included 'Amorous Supplication' and 'Ecstasy'. The first presented the girl with a prayer-like attitude, eyes heavenward, seated upright in bed, while in the latter she was smiling with her hands and eyes lifted to the sky.<sup>18</sup> The first of two later books, *Les Démoniaques de l'art* (1887), contained a similar image of a Salpêtrière patient's 'hysterical ecstasy'.<sup>19</sup> Yet, in this publication which reviewed images of the possessed throughout the history of art, hysterical ecstasy was once again directly compared to 'religious ecstasy', and that of Saint Catherine of Siena, a flowing hospital gown doubling for medieval dress to add extra likeness to the pictures. [Figure 1].

From his scientific and positivist perspective, Max Nordau viewed the link between mystical ecstasy and 'jouissance' as self-explanatory given that the only normal, organic experience known to humans that could be compared to mystical ecstasy was orgasm. It was thus only natural that hysterics of both sexes should associate erotic representation with their ecstatic apperceptions, that ecstasy should be interpreted as other-worldly love-making, as an inexpressibly exalted and pure union with God or the Virgin Mary. The association of mystical ecstasy with Christianity was thus the

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<sup>16</sup> Showalter, 148-50.

<sup>17</sup> Showalter, 145-155. Susan McClary (*Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*; (Minnesota & Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 92) refers to the 'madness/sexuality nexus' in Charcot's work.

<sup>18</sup> Showalter's monograph reproduces three images of Augustine (151-3) drawn from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*.

result of a religious education that encouraged the habit of explaining inexplicable happenings as supernatural and establishing links between those phenomena and religious imagery.<sup>20</sup> Influenced by Charcot's and Bergson's theories on the importance of the image in the unconscious (as discussed in the last chapter), Nordau takes it for granted, therefore, that hysteria should be manifested by 'representation' (erotic or otherwise) whose meaning was often deciphered through religious iconography. Once again, unusual sexual habits were explained, and hence tamed, as the natural pendant to a traditional, religious upbringing.

Religious Ecstatic State: Saint Catherine of Sienna, by Paul Richer. From *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, by J.-M. Charcot and Paul Richer.



Hysterical Ecstasy: Salpêtrière Patient, by Paul Richer. From *Les Démoniaques dans l'art*, by J.-M. Charcot and Paul Richer.

Figure 1.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The second book appeared in 1889 entitled *Les Difformes et les malades dans l'art*. Silverman, 98-100.

<sup>20</sup> Max Nordau, *Dégénérescence*, trans. Auguste Dietrich, (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1894), 1, 115-6.

<sup>21</sup> Drawn from Silverman, 99.

The equation of hysterical, mystical and sexual ecstasy is, of course, to be found in Hérode's feminised dream "Vision fugitive". Thus Hérode's sexual desire is linked to his mental instability (due to drug-taking) and to a mystical sensibility, underlined by the use of the saxophone and its capacity to evoke mystical dreams. Through these associations the emasculation of Hérode's character is complete. But the commonly held associations between the unconscious, mystical ecstasy, sexual gratification and Catholicism were also disseminated through popular literature, and particularly in Emile Zola's controversial but influential *Lourdes*, written in naturalistic vein and published in 1893, just a few months before the première of *Thaïs* at the Opéra. Pilgrimage to Lourdes was established after apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. The nature of Bernadette's visions intimated the healing qualities of the town's spring water, and Lourdes quickly became a place of pilgrimage and an important and influential event in the Catholic calendar. By the 1890s, Lourdes's enterprise had developed to include baths, hotels, hospitals and a medical office to document the cases of those pilgrims declared cured of their ailments and to decide upon the miraculous (or not) nature of their cures. It was at this time that Zola visited Lourdes himself. Zola was influenced by Charcot's late text 'La foi qui guérit' in which Charcot outlined that religious faith could produce similar but stronger suggestive effects on certain patients than medical authority.<sup>22</sup> Focusing on 'miraculées', Zola's novel portrayed these miraculously cured women as hysterics, and divine mercy as the power of suggestion. Indeed, his heroine Marie de Guersaint's cure, during a Eucharistic procession, reads like an orgasmic sexual encounter. The moment she feels cured is her 'extase' and is described as the nearest the virginal Marie will ever get to the sexual experience.<sup>23</sup> Thus Marie can be seen to resemble Thaïs whose ultimate mystical encounter surpasses her former sexual ones, and in a similar way to Zola, Gallet and Massenet can be seen to develop the idea of divine communion and ecstatic elation in their portrayal of the less than virginal Thaïs.

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<sup>22</sup> Harris, 334-5, 350. Charcot, 'La foi qui guérit', *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 3 December 1892, 112-32. Charcot also noted the faith healing of disorders not previously considered as hysterical in origin which should have therefore rendered them impervious to suggestive forces such as those used in faith healing at Lourdes. Charcot's conclusions, rather than reconsidering the power of faith healing, thus affirmed that a wider range of disorders could be attributed to hysteria than previously thought.

### Thaïs's Religious Culture, Mystical Sensuality, and Hysteria

Anatole France's 1890 novel *Thaïs* was not merely a decadent morality tale of the perdition of a monk and the salvation of a courtesan. *Thaïs* represents the conflict between the laws of Eros and those of the Christian faith,<sup>24</sup> but also presents a conflation of the Christian and pagan cults in Thaïs's behaviour: Eros and God are venerated in similar ways, and are interchangeable.<sup>25</sup> The story is thus a hymn to Venus, to beauty and to universal desire, and Thaïs is saved because she recognises these values in all contexts. Thaïs confuses and amalgamates a materialistic notion of eternal beauty and the intangible concept of eternal life; her desire, from its most earthy to its most spiritual expression, ignores repression, guilt and expiation. It follows the path of Eros right up until her death, her death being what the artist Keller would have described as her supreme *jouissance*. Paphnuce, on the other hand, is damned because of his refusal to acknowledge all that is tender and wonderful in life—nature, food, the arts—and his repression of and calumnies against that universal desire within him.<sup>26</sup> His Christian faith is seen to curse Eros, promising salvation only to those who can resist temptation. The supremacy of the pagan cult is, indeed, outlined by the Gnostic Zénothémis during the banquet scene of France's text that frames the philosophical content of the novel: those who obey carnal desire follow the divine path, albeit one that engenders suffering and death.<sup>27</sup>

As well as being a courtesan, Thaïs is a follower and priestess of the cult of Venus. Odon Vallet describes how the cult of Venus-Aphrodite was served by *hierodules*,

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<sup>23</sup> See Harris, 304-5, 331-9.

<sup>24</sup> Sylvie Huel, 'Thaïs et la morale d'une époque', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, May 1988, 80-1.

<sup>25</sup> This is also true of the musical characterisations of Venus and God who are often given mutual claims over the 'godly' key of C major. The Greek version of Venus's progeny, Eros, is venerated in this way, a chord of C major underpinning Thaïs's 'tender and chaste' supplication of Athanaël to allow her to keep her statuette of the god. C major is used by Athanaël as he addresses his God "Toi qui mis la pitié dans nos âmes, Dieu bon, louange à toi!" ["You who grant our souls mercy, bountiful God, be praised!"], and chords of C major appear as Athanaël defends Thaïs as an "épouse de Dieu" and on his recognition of the venerable Albine and her pious "filles blanches". Linked to Venus's power—"Vénus, éclat du ciel" and "Ose venir toi qui brace Vénus!" ["Venus, brilliance of heaven" and "Dare to approach you who braves Venus!"], in addition accompanied by traditionally religious musical imagery of angelic harps and organ—C major is also used for those acts that serve her voluptuous cult: Thaïs's wish for a last night of "folle ivresse et divin oubli!" ["wild ecstasy and heavenly oblivion!"] with Nicias in Act I is also underlined by a chord of C major.

<sup>26</sup> See Marie-Claire Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I*, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1984), 1333-4.

<sup>27</sup> See Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 1332-3.

literally, 'sacred slaves'.<sup>28</sup> Whilst their person was considered holy, their virtue was sacrificed as their purpose was to welcome faithful worshippers both physically and sexually.<sup>29</sup> This sacred prostitution venerated the generative and procreative forces of Venus whilst procuring valuable resources for her temples. The sacred servants participated in the liturgy of the holy temples and were considered as the brides of the divinity in the same way that Christian nuns are considered the brides of Christ, married to God but ready to serve humanity. As *Thaïs* receives Athanaël in the opera, her similarity to these sacred prostitutes of Venus is notable, despite the fact that *Thaïs*'s is a 'private practice'. Yet *Thaïs* reinforces her religion's similarity with the Christian cult by calling upon Venus as "seen and unseen".<sup>30</sup> Venus is thus referred to in the same way as Christ during the Eucharist, the Christian ritual experience of divine communion and ecstatic fulfilment. In nineteenth-century Parisian women's religious communities, such as the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Auxiliatrices, taking communion—the eating of the body of Christ—was an act of mystical union with God. In the same way that couples 'become one' in Christian marriage, so a nun became one with Christ through the eucharist, experiencing a sense of religious

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<sup>28</sup> Hierodules figure prominently in Pierre Louÿs's novel *Aphrodite* of 1896. Indeed, Louÿs considered *Thaïs* an excellent reconstitution of Antiquity, annotating a copy of France's novel dating from 1895, and criticising what he considered to be errors. [See Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 1340, drawn from Max-Philippe Delatte, 'Pierre Louÿs, critique d'Anatole France', *Le Lys rouge*, 6, 1980, 1-3.] Notwithstanding any eventual esteem for *Thaïs*, Louÿs made it publically clear that he scorned any comparison of his *Aphrodite* with *Thaïs*. In the preface to his novel he wrote: "The female character which occupies the central position in the novel that you will leaf through is a courtesan of Antiquity; but let the reader be reassured: she will not be converted. She will be loved by neither monk, nor prophet, nor god. In today's literature, it is somewhat original." ["Le personnage féminin qui occupe la première place dans le roman qu'on va feuilleter est une courtisane antique; mais que le lecteur se rassure: elle ne se convertira pas. Elle ne sera aimée ni par un moine, ni par un prophète, ni par un dieu. Dans la littérature actuelle, c'est une originalité."] Jean-Paul Goujon points out that a published copy of Louÿs's *Aphrodite* was annotated by its author at this point: "Aimables allusions à *Thaïs*, *Hérodiade*, *Marie-Madeleine*, etc." [See Louÿs, *Aphrodite*, 379.] This reference to *Hérodiade* was perhaps meant for *Salomé*, indeed, in fin-de-siècle minds the confusion of mother and daughter was complete; *Salomé* and *Hérodiade* were blended into one single image of ferocious vampire blood lust in popular spirit. [See Kramer, 'Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2/3, 1990, 269-94; Dijkstra, 387.] But Louÿs may well have been citing opera/oratorio/literary titles, thus disdaining the popular heroines of the day, two of which were treated by Anatole France and all three by Massenet. Louÿs went as far as to say: "*Thaïs* [...] awakens within me, despite its perfection of style, but feelings of sincere and profound antipathy." ["*Thaïs* [...] n'éveille en moi, malgré sa perfection de style, que des sentiments de sincère et profonde antipathie."] See Goujon preface (14) where he cites this unpublished letter to an unidentified critic in 1896 (coll. part.).

<sup>29</sup> Odon Vallet, *Le Honteux et le sacré : Grammaire de l'érotisme divin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 15-6.

<sup>30</sup> *Thaïs*: "Vénus, invisible et présente!"



ecstasy.<sup>31</sup> In this way, therefore, Christian and pagan cults are further confused in the opera, as too are the notions of sexual and spiritual *jouissance*.

Anatole France's novel tells us much more than the opera about Thaïs's Christian culture. As a child, the narrative tells us, Thaïs was nurtured by Ahmès, a black slave who lived with her family; by contrast her parents neglected and mistreated her. Despite Diocletian's persecutions of the Christian Church, Ahmès attended secret services, instructed Thaïs in the Gospels and had her baptised. Ahmès, or Theodore as he was renamed by the Church, was later martyred for his beliefs and was elevated to the station of saint. As an adult, Thaïs covertly visits churches in a vain search for the 'meaning of life' and, one evening, comes across a service dedicated to the memory of Saint Theodore the Nubian:

The hymns that they sang [...] expressed the delights of suffering that blended, in a triumphal grief, so much elation and so much pain that Thaïs, listening to them, felt both the pleasures of life and the throes of death flow at once in her replenished senses. [...] Onto this obscure memory [of Ahmès], both gentle and painful, the brightness of candles, the perfume of roses, the clouds of incense, the harmony of canticles, the piety of souls projected glory's charms. In her bedazzlement Thaïs pondered: "He was humble and yet here he is great and beautiful! How did he rise above other men? What is this unknown thing that is worth more than riches and voluptuous pleasures?"<sup>32</sup>

France's heroine is attracted to Christian celebration by the sensual aspects of its ceremonies. Her baptism as a child was a sensual experience, accompanied by "une danse amoureuse", an ancient tribal dance performed by Ahmès and another Nubian slave, Nitida. Thaïs's angst is thus as much subdued and reassured by the sensuality of the interior of the church as by the mixed sentiments of painful grief and rejoicing that she finds there. Indeed, her reflection leads her to envy Ahmès's success and the glorious 'secret' that elevates his humble existence to the realms of the adored and of eternal beauty. For Thaïs, Christianity and sensuality go hand in hand.

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<sup>31</sup> I would like to thank Ingrid Sykes for sharing her unpublished research with me on *Music as Divine Inspiration: The Musical Life of the congregations in Nineteenth-Century France*.

<sup>32</sup> See *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 773: "Les hymnes qu'ils chantaient [...] exprimaient les délices de la souffrance et mêlaient, dans un deuil triomphal, tant d'allégresse à tant de douleur, que Thaïs, en les écoutant, sentait les voluptés de la vie et les affres de la mort couler à la fois dans ses sens renouvelés. [...] Sur cette mémoire obscure [d'Ahmès], douce et douloureuse, l'éclat des cierges, le parfum des roses, les nuées de l'encens, l'harmonie des cantiques, la piété des âmes jetait les charmes de la gloire. Thaïs songeait dans l'éblouissement: « Il était humble et voici qu'il est grand et qu'il est beau ! Comment s'est-il élevé au-dessus des hommes ? Quelle est donc cette chose inconnue qui vaut mieux que la richesse et que la volupté ? »"

It is against this backdrop that Paphnuce arrives to convert Thaïs. Indeed, Thaïs's conversion in the novel is immediate, and she merely 'sobs' with emotion.<sup>33</sup> Yet, due to the mystico-religious circumstances of this breakdown, following the reawakening of Thaïs's Christian conscience, the decadent writer Jean Lorrain, in his review following the publication of France's novel, claimed that Thaïs would have been classed as a "classic case of neurosis" in the *fin de siècle*.<sup>34</sup> As discussed, the opera contains a number of hallucinatory visions and ballets which portray the deviant workings of Athanaël's unconscious. However, in addition to such a characterisation of Athanaël, the opera also addresses Thaïs's mental instability by associating her with the clinically-defined malady of hysteria. Massenet and Gallet took the idea of a neurotic Thaïs, as suggested by Lorrain, on board: the opera's Thaïs has a much more dramatic crisis of conscience than her literary counterpart, emotionally dismissing Athanaël and Nicias and crying: "No! I will remain Thaïs! Thaïs the courtesan! I no longer believe in anything – I want nothing more: not him [Nicias], not you [Athanaël] nor God!"<sup>35</sup> The authors followed this outcry with a peal of hysterical laughter for Thaïs. The staging book for the original production notes:

The closing of this scene should give the impression of an attack of hysterics, beginning with a strident burst of laughter and ending with violent sobs.<sup>36</sup>

This portrayal of Thaïs as a hysteric finds no direct precedent in Anatole France's novel and was suggested by only a few critics following the publication of the novel in 1890. But the early 1890s saw a proliferation of writings on the subject of religious ecstasy and hysterical seizure as Charcot's, Zola's and Nordau's aforementioned texts witness.<sup>37</sup> In addition to this, Gallet not only moved in literary

<sup>33</sup> *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 773-5: "Thaïs [...] fondit en larmes. [...] Elle [...] passa la nuit à sangloter."

<sup>34</sup> Jean Lorrain, 'Chronique de Paris. Thaïs', *Le Courrier français*, 16 November 1890, 4. Lorrain also adds dramatic impact to Thaïs's 'sobbing' by affirming that Thaïs 'éclat en sanglots'.

<sup>35</sup> Thaïs, Act II, end 1<sup>er</sup> tableau: "Non! Je reste Thaïs! Thaïs la courtisane! Je ne crois plus à rien – et je ne veux plus rien: Ni lui [Nicias], ni toi [Athanaël], ni Dieu!"

<sup>36</sup> Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale, Thaïs, T8 (I), 29: "Cette fin de scène doit donner l'illusion d'une attaque de nerfs commençant par un éclat de rire strident et se terminant par des sanglots violents."

<sup>37</sup> Such monographs included Henri Colin, *Essai sur l'état mental des hystériques*, 1890; Gaston Danville, *La Psychologie de l'amour*, 1894; Sigmund Freud & Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 1895; Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1886, translated into French by Emile Laurent and Sigismond Csapo in 1895; J. Roubinovitch, *Hystérie mâle et dégénérescence*, 1890; Christian Ufer, *Nervosität und Mädchenerziehung in Haus und Schule*, 1890. References drawn from Nordau; Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985); Rosario, *L'Irrésistible ascension du pervers : entre littérature et psychiatrie*, trans. Guy Le Gaufey (Paris: Epel, 2000).

and artistic circles but was himself an hospital administrator. Gallet wrote plays, novels, essays and memoirs, as well as a large number of libretti for Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Bruneau, Gounod, Bizet, Benjamin Godard, Théodore Dubois and Emile Paladhile. However, alongside his literary career, Gallet retained a high-ranking civil service post in *l'Assistance publique*, publishing a book on the Lariboisière Hospital, where he worked, and another on the emergency services.<sup>38</sup> Gallet's familiarity with hospitals and modern medical procedures may well have influenced his portrayal of Thaïs. Indeed, on the first page of the article by Jacques Bonnaure about Gallet and his libretto for *Thaïs* appears the subtitle in bold lettering "De l'Hôpital Lariboisière au Palais Garnier". Whilst supposedly referring to Gallet himself, one might ask whether this phrase might not more appropriately be applied to Thaïs as characterised by Gallet as a hysteric.

The opera's authors may well have wished also to continue a tradition of mad scenes in nineteenth-century opera, stretching back to Donizetti's *Lucia* (1835), via Massenet's teacher Ambroise Thomas and his Ophélie (*Hamlet*, 1868). Indeed, Thomas's musical characterisation of the deranged Ophelia, heavily influenced by Donizetti's model, may have in turn influenced Massenet's composition of Thaïs's hysteria. Massenet was no doubt also inspired by Sibyl Sanderson's vocal facility for staccato, super-register notes, which he used in his musical translation of Thaïs's emotional outburst.<sup>39</sup> [Example 1a.] The notes written are not sung but usually interpreted as peals of stage laughter which, nevertheless, approximately touch the written pitches. At the end of Act III, Athanaël once again dreams of a seductive Thaïs before setting off to join her at the convent before her death. Thaïs's overt sexual provocation of Athanaël and reference to Venus are quickly followed by hysterical laughter: Thaïs's words 'degenerate' into a repeated "Ah!" for the pyrotechnical vocal display. [Example 1b.] Indeed, the 'hysterical' demisemiquavers

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<sup>38</sup> See Jacques Bonnaure, 'Le peplum « mélique » : un genre impur', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, May 1988, 18-21, at 18.

<sup>39</sup> The role of Thaïs was created for Sanderson, and whilst there is less documentary evidence of collaboration than there is for Massenet's 1889 opera *Esclarmonde*, the light orchestration of Thaïs's music and the inclusion of specific vocal effects imply the imprint of Sanderson's musical persona on the character of Thaïs. The press reception of the opera displayed a conflation of heroine and singer which can be viewed as a two-way process, for not only was Thaïs's moral character projected onto Sanderson, but also Sanderson's vocal identity affected the characterisation of Thaïs. The mapping of the real-life, morally questionable singer (she was reputedly Massenet's mistress) and her voice onto the inner voice of her fictional character but stressed the perceived link between hysteria and sexuality, which was also highlighted on stage.

of the orchestral tremolo chords accompanying her laughter are calmed and slowed down to semiquaver tremolos to underpin Athanaël's nonetheless excited but sustained reply. As a product of Athanaël's imagination here, Thaïs is physically 'contained' and is thus essentially controllable in a similar way to Hérode's vision of Salomé in "Vision fugitive". Through the association of her effusive sexuality with her neurotic outburst, she is also medically catalogued, and thus neutralised, within the realm of hysteria. However, Thaïs manages to break out of the physical, scenic and psychological frame imposed around her due to the power of her physical presence. For this scene, the dramatic vision of the opera's designers Eugène Carpezat and Marcel Jambon, no doubt formulated in collaboration with Gallet, Massenet and Lapissida (the stage director),<sup>40</sup> comprised a cartoon-like image of Athanaël with a 'think bubble', containing his vision of Thaïs for the audience to see.

Example 1a

Thaïs

non ni lui, ni toi, ni ton Dieu

*cresc.* *sf*

*poco ritenuto* *a Tempo appassionato.*

*più f* *suives* *sf* *cresc.*

Th.

(Eclatant de rire) (Ici avec des pleurs et des sanglots)

Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi Ahi

(à volonté) (RIDEAU)

*sec.* *suives* *All° maestoso. (sans lenteur)*

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that for the première of new works at this time, it was usual for the composer, the librettist, as well as the theatre directors (in the case of *Thaïs*, Pedro Gailhard in particular) to have as much a hand in the stage direction as the person nominally appointed director.

However, Massenet destroyed the tenets on which this concept was based by envisaging a Thaïs who, even as a creation of Athanaël's unconscious, could break out of the constraints, and the bubble, placed upon her voice and her body. Massenet stressed this notion in a *Note pour l'Opéra* addressed to Louis Gallet in July 1893 which contained his precise demands for the scenery and staging of his opera.<sup>41</sup> In relation to this Act III vision, Massenet was concerned that the technical apparatus of the 'bubble' stage effect—a doorway screened by a metallic canvas—would frame and petrify Thaïs:

- but it is not question of a calm, plastic apparition – it concerns Thaïs appearing close to Athanaël's bed and tempting him with words and even more so by *actions* that accompany and underline this acted scene.
- therefore, there is reason to be wary of this sort of apparition in a doorway
- Thaïs *must leave the frame and move*<sup>42</sup>

As in the Act I vision, Thaïs's body is the focus of attention—it is her *actions* that are important in the *scène jouée* in which Thaïs nevertheless sings—and it is through this empowering of her body that Massenet's Thaïs is able to assert herself, to use her own free will to step out of the frame—artistic, physical and psychological—created to contain her and her disturbing sexuality.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the subtleties of Massenet's dramatic vision, Thaïs was nevertheless perceived as possessing hysterical symptoms, in particular by the satirical and pictorial press. The written press following the première merely read Thaïs's emotional breakdown as a revolt against God and men, a characteristic of a would-be emancipated woman, who was quickly identified with decadence, degeneration and hysteria. But caricatures of the opera took this idea much further, suggesting that

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<sup>41</sup> See Patrick Gillis, 'Thaïs à L'Opéra: Du roman à la comédie lyrique, pertes et profits', *Anatole France. Humanisme et Actualité, Actes du Colloque pour le cent cinquantième anniversaire de la mort [sic] d'Anatole France*, (Paris: Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, 1994), 107-34, at 131-3.

<sup>42</sup> Gillis, 133: " - mais il ne s'agit pas d'une apparition calme, plastique – il s'agit de Thaïs paraissant près de la couche d'Athanaël et le tentant par des paroles et encore plus par *les gestes* qui accompagnent et soulignent cette scène jouée. - Il y a donc lieu de se méfier de cette forme d'apparition dans une porte - Thaïs *doit sortir du cadre, bouger*"

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Gillis (109, 126-7) discusses a "community of inspiration" between France, Massenet and Gallet with regard to the figure of the 'belle pécheresse'; both France and Massenet, the latter in collaboration with Louis Gallet, for instance, worked on their respective versions of *Marie-Magdeleine* between 1868 and 1873. I would insist, however, that the idea which links France and Massenet seems rather to be that of universal desire and beauty, for their respective treatments of the character of Thaïs are very different. France's interpretation of his heroine remains more directly within the decadent literary canon of a male-fantasised heroine, and Bancquart ((ed.), 1984, 1335) points out that France's Thaïs does not act of her own initiative in the novel but that she is merely a muse and is 'acted' throughout. Massenet's and Gallet's Thaïs, on the other hand, transposed from the

Thaïs's overt sexuality displayed in the first half of the opera was a symptom of her nervous disorder, and that her conversion was the result of hypnosis and suggestion during which Thaïs was able to transfigure her sexual urges into 'extase'.<sup>44</sup>

Example 1b

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with three staves: Thaïs (soprano), Athanaël (bass), and Piano accompaniment. The first system is marked '(Purca stridentis)' and '(à volonté)'. Thaïs sings 'Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl' and Athanaël responds 'Tha - is!'. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic of *fp* and the instruction 'suivez'. The second system is marked '(de même)'. Thaïs sings 'Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl' and Athanaël responds 'Viens!'. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic of *fp* and the instruction 'suivez'. The third system is marked 'più *ff*' and '(l'image de THAÏS disparaît subitement)'. Thaïs sings 'Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl Ahl' and Athanaël responds 'Viens! Viens! Tha-is!'. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic of *fp* and the instruction 'suivez', followed by 'Allegro' and 'largo (très sec)'. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*ff*, *fp*, *f*, *dim.*), articulations (accents, slurs), and performance instructions.

narrative to the dramatic form, is given a voice and a will to act, demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in this Act III vision scene.

However, the opera offered no remedy for the curing of Thaïs's 'condition' other than divine intervention and the sublimation of hysterical ecstasy into mystical ecstasy at the point of her self-sacrificial demise. This fashionable, but problematic notion was thus sanitised in certain caricatures by the depiction of Thaïs's 'therapy'. With Thaïs cast as hysteric, Athanaël, for all his dreaming, was left with the role of the Charcotesque hypnotist. Caran d'Ache's cartoon which appeared in *Le Journal* on 6 April 1894 shows Athanaël, his eyes firmly fixed on Thaïs, slowly moving his right hand above the tip of his left index finger, a fixed focal point for Thaïs's mesmerised gaze (in contrast to Athanaël, the pupils of her eyes are absent). [Figure 2.] Meanwhile, Grosclaude's accompanying text notes that it is by suggestion that Athanaël convinces Thaïs to give up her former life and enter a convent.



Figure 2.

Grosclaude's text also implies that Thaïs's former lover Nicias believes he is a cuckold, thus supporting Charcot's notion of perceived excessive sexual displays by his female patients during hypnosis. Indeed, the title of this cartoon is indicative of the connection in the public perception of emancipated/mad/licentious/mystical woman: *Thaïs à l'Opéra ou Paphnuce et Chloë. Folie mystique en vers libérés, à la façon de M. Louis Gallet*, directly linked Thaïs to Greek mythology's story of erotic dance and female sexual initiative, provoked by 'mystical madness' in which the

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<sup>44</sup> The caricature by Stop and Michelet in *Le Journal amusant*, pictures Athanaël as a hypnotist with arms outstretched, and the accompanying text actually explains that Thaïs's conversion and retreat into a religious community are the result of suggestion techniques practiced by Athanaël whilst she is under hypnotic trance. See Michelet & Stop, 'Stop échos', *Le Journal amusant*, 1961, 31 March 1894,

term of 'liberated' was transposed from woman to the rhythmic prose adopted by Louis Gallet for the libretto in which the librettist was freed from the obligation of rhyme (as discussed in the last chapter).<sup>45</sup>

### Symphonic Interludes, *Méditation religieuse* and Musical *Extase*

Immediately following Thaïs's hysterical dismissal of Athanaël and his promise to her of eternal life if she converts, the *Méditation religieuse*, which musically and dramatically symbolises Thaïs's conversion in the opera, is played. Gallet's and Massenet's inclusion of programmatic symphonic interludes was a further example of the shift away from texted communicative media in the opera. In his preface to the libretto, Gallet explained that his literary procedure was aimed directly at facilitating Massenet's compositional talent. He (rightfully) attributed to Massenet a fine theatrical sense, writing:

He who is so sensitive to the purity of the literary form and its chosen shape, is even more so with regard to the power and depth of the image; his mind conjures up a very intense and sharp impression; he does not hesitate therefore to clear away all that accompanies this image rhythmically, whether material, moral, picturesque or psychological, in order to perceive it better, seize it, possess it.

It is for this image that he builds his musical edifice; he creates a temple for it where the image is shown off in the best light, he reproduces it in the various details of his architecture; he makes all the expressive forces available to him converge on it.<sup>46</sup>

As befitted his era, obsessed with the workings of the human brain, the mind's translation of ideas into images and the beginnings of cinema, Gallet defined Massenet's dramatic acuity in terms of an image translated directly into music of at

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5. For biographical information on the caricaturist, costume designer and theatre librettist Stop (alias Louis Retz), see Emile Bayard, *La Caricature et les caricaturistes* (Paris, 1900), 215-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Folie* is also a multi-layered term. Emile Littré's dictionary (1863-1873) provides the following definitions: "derangement of the mind"; "excessive passion"; "In medical terms, partial or complete lesion of intellectual and emotional faculties"; "lively gayness in which state one does or says things intended to amuse"; "la Folie, fictitious character represented as a woman with fool's bauble and bells", "joviality in words or actions"; "strange or absurd ideas"; "caricature, pleasant cartoon"; "pleasant piece of writing of caricatural nature". These last two definitions predetermine caricature as the ideal medium for the communication of mental disturbance, and highlight the subtle word play of the title of the Caran d'Ache & Grosclaude's caricature. See *Dictionnaire de la langue française, abrégé du dictionnaire de Emile Littré de l'Académie française par A. Beaujean, 2* (Paris: Editions de l'Erable, 1967), 478.

<sup>46</sup> Gallet, 'A propos de « Thaïs ». Poésie mélique', *Le Ménestrel*, 11 March 1894, 73-5, at 74: "Lui, si sensible qu'il soit à la pureté de la forme littéraire et à son contour recherché, l'est plus encore à la puissance et au relief de l'image; son esprit en reçoit une impression très intense, très aiguë; il n'hésite pas alors à déblayer, pour la mieux percevoir, la mieux saisir, la mieux posséder, tout ce qui enveloppe et accompagne rythmiquement cette image, qu'elle soit d'ailleurs matérielle ou morale, pittoresque ou psychologique.

C'est pour cette image qu'il construit son édifice musical; il lui en fait un temple où elle est mise en pleine lumière et en pleine valeur; il la reproduit dans les divers détails de son architecture; il fait converger sur elle toutes les forces expressives dont il dispose."



least equal, or of even greater, communicative power than the text. He went on to give an example drawn from their collaboration on the 'mystère' *Eve*, nearly twenty years earlier, in which the composer had omitted the last word of the sentence "La création divine s'illumine de son regard caressant" ["The divine creation lights up under his tender gaze"]. This suspension had allowed the music to expand:

[The music] discovered horizons that the word "caressant" barred, gauged too narrowly, and instead of a restrained impression, the musician gives us a wide vision of the infinite.<sup>47</sup>

Massenet's musical idiom was thus defined by Gallet as capable of going beyond the text from which it took its lead, of surpassing logocentric expression due to its infinitely more expressive communicative medium.

The opinions Gallet expresses in his preface loudly echoed those propounded by the Italian librettist Ferdinando Fontana in his 1884 pamphlet, *In Teatro*. Fontana believed, like Gallet, that bad and badly-set libretti were the humiliation of poetry and poets.<sup>48</sup> Following on from Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* and *Oper und Drama*, Fontana devalued traditional libretti and, in the spirit of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and *Parsifal* (two of the operas consistently cited in the debate of this era as containing extended symphonic passages to be emulated), advocated the inclusion of symphonic interludes of programmatic music capable of continuing the dramatic action of an opera. In the wake of Fontana's theories, Italian opera composers, such as Mascagni with *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890) and Leoncavallo with *I Pagliacci* (1892), included orchestral intermezzi in their operas, although these operas' interludes do not serve a strict dramatic function.<sup>49</sup> And yet transitional interludes of programmatic music used to move the drama forward can be traced from seventeenth-century opera onwards. In the nineteenth-century, Franco-Italian operatic tradition, Berlioz's 'dramatic symphony' *Roméo et Juliette* (1836), for three soloists, chorus and

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<sup>47</sup> Gallet, 'A propos de « Thaïs ». Poésie mélodique', 74: "Elle [la musique] découvre des horizons que le mot « caressant » lui barrait, lui mesurait trop étroitement, et au lieu d'une impression restreinte, le musicien nous donne une large vision sur l'infini."

<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Maehder, 'Szenische Imagination und Stoffwahl in der italienischen Oper des Fin de siècle' in Jürgen Maehder & Jürg Stenzl (eds.), *Zwischen Opera buffa und Melodramma. Italienische Oper in 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Perspektiven der Opernforschung, 1 (Bern & Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), 187-248, at 216-7.

<sup>49</sup> The dramatic plan, including the transitional symphonic interlude, of Massenet's *verismo* work *La Navarraise*, première, the same year as *Thaïs*, at Covent Garden, owes a debt to Mascagni's opera which was première at the Opéra Comique in French translation by Paul Milliet as *La Chevalerie rustique* in 1892.

orchestra, leaves the love scene to the orchestra alone.<sup>50</sup> Gounod used an orchestral prelude, resuming the dramatic action that had not been seen on stage to facilitate a well-paced continuation of the action, at a similar point in his opera on the same subject. In the prelude to Act IV of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (1867), four cellos sound a short but sensually graphic tone-poem depicting the night the lovers have spent together, allowing the first scene of the act to deal with the imminent and painful parting of the couple.<sup>51</sup> Verdi used the same scoring in the introduction of the love duet from Act I of *Otello* (1887). Indeed, interludes are often used to represent that which cannot be portrayed on stage, i.e. the sexual act, as in the *Symphonie des amours d'Aphrodite* from *Thaïs* and the postlude at the end of Act II of Massenet's *Esclarmonde* (1889).<sup>52</sup> Puccini also continued the use of the dramatic interlude in both his youthful *Le Villi* (1884), and more consummately in his *Manon Lescaut* of 1893 where an intermezzo at the start of Act III, reminiscent of both the Gounod and Massenet examples cited above by its use of strings and cellos, successfully depicts Manon's journey as a destitute prisoner to the port of Le Havre before being deported to Louisiana. The second act from *Thaïs* contained two symphonic interludes, the *Symphonie des amours d'Aphrodite* and the *Méditation religieuse*. The third act included the instrumental *Ballet de la Tentation* and the *Course dans la nuit* interlude, linking into the final scene of the opera. [See Appendix 2.]

In his essays from the 1970s on musical semantics, Roland Barthes recognised a "field of significance" in music, as opposed to a "system of signs" in language, but nevertheless claimed: "Compared to the writer, the musician is always mad (the writer can never be so for he is condemned to meaning)."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, instrumental music has been considered throughout the ages as a non-signifying medium, lacking

<sup>50</sup> See Steven Huebner, *The Operas of Charles Gounod*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 158-9.

<sup>51</sup> Massenet introduced a similar prelude at the start of the fourth scene of his 'légende sacrée' *La Vierge* (1880), 'Le Dernier sommeil de la Vierge' for solo cello and muted strings, to depict Mary's rather more virginal sleep.

<sup>52</sup> In relation to this postlude and its dramatic function as sexual climax see Annegret Fauser, 'Le rôle de l'élément érotique dans l'œuvre de Massenet', *Massenet en son temps. Actes du colloque organisé en 1992 à l'occasion du deuxième Festival Massenet* (Saint-Etienne: Association du Festival Massenet/L'Esplanade Saint-Etienne Opéra, 1999), 156-79, at 168-72. See also Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98-9.

<sup>53</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rasch', *L'obvie et l'obtus. Essais critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 265-77, at 273: "Par rapport à l'écrivain, le musicien est toujours fou (et l'écrivain, lui, ne peut jamais l'être, car il est condamné au sens)."

the semiotic codes at work within other communicative media such as language.<sup>54</sup>

The *Méditation* was written at a time when the common view held was that:

Music, pure music without words, precisely because its notes do not have definite significance nor its phrases firm meaning, is, of all the art forms, the most adequate expression of these immaterial realities [the human soul and supreme love].<sup>55</sup>

Gustave Dérépas is here describing aspects of César Franck's symphonic poem with chorus *Psyché* (1888). Indeed, Franck himself wrote to Edouard Colonne of revisions to his score:

The phrases thus given to the full orchestra are those of Psyche's sleep. It will be as if her dream was gradually coming to life.<sup>56</sup>

Orchestral music is thus defined capable of expressing the inexpressible, as being the key that, in line with symbolist aesthetics, unlocks the door to the dreamworld and mysticism.<sup>57</sup> Franck's musical life was transformed into a religious mission by his 'disciples' who were aghast at his translation of the erotic pagan antique legend of Psyche. Ernest Chausson, Guy Ropartz, Julien Tiersot and Vincent d'Indy (to whom the work is dedicated), all in different ways, managed to minimise the erotic nature of both the text and the music which comprised luxuriant orchestration and chains of ninth chords to accompany the chorus's "O white sister of the lily, softer than daybreak and more beautiful than beauty, do you not feel a warm desire blossom in

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<sup>54</sup> Susan McClary points out that the logocentricity of Western culture relegates music to the realms of excess and madness. See McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 102.

<sup>55</sup> Gustave Dérépas, *César Franck, étude sur sa vie, son enseignement, son œuvre*, (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897) cited in Vincent d'Indy, *César Franck* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1906), 156: "La musique, la musique pure sans paroles, précisément parce que ses notes n'ont pas une signification définie, ses phrases un sens arrêté, est, de toutes les formes de l'art, l'expression la plus adéquates de ces réalités immatérielles [l'Âme humaine et l'Amour suprême]."

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Franck to Colonne at the beginning of February 1890 cited in *César Franck: Correspondance réunie, annotée et présentée par Joël-Marie Fauquet* (Sprimont, Belgium: Mardaga, 1999), 215: "Les phrases ainsi confiées au grand orchestre sont celles du sommeil de Psyché. Ce sera comme si son rêve se réalisait peu à peu."

<sup>57</sup> Camille Mauclair wrote: "Heureusement, il est convenu que la musique est un plaisir, et, pour certains, une névrose: sans quoi, si tous comprenaient qu'elle est *la dernière prière*, on devrait craindre que la vie ordinaire se vengeât. Mais protégée par le snobisme, l'incompréhension et l'espoir de spasmes plus raffinés que ceux de l'amour physique, elle peut encore impunément nous donner, en plein modernisme athée, le spectacle mystique des exaltation du moyen âge, avec ses moines, ses extasiés, ses rituels et ses grands saints aussi, depuis Saint Augustin, qui s'appelle en cette religion Beethoven, jusqu'à saint François d'Assise que nous appelons César Franck." [Drawn from Mauclair's *La Religion de la musique*, written in 1909, published ten years later, cited in Youens, 'Le Soleil des morts: A Fin-de-siècle Portrait Gallery', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, XI, 1, Summer 1987, 43-58, at. 54.] Indeed, Mauclair's search for an alternative sort of mysticism and ecstasy leads him to music. He admits, however, his nostalgia of simple, early, medieval Christian faith, mapping early, historical figures of Christianity onto nineteenth-century composers. For Mauclair it seems, it is orchestral music of the nineteenth century that represented this 'age d'ôr' of ecstasy provoking music. His image of César Franck as the humble saint François who presented Christ as a loving father, ready

your worried breast?", or "He will come, the mysterious husband, and in your virginal breast will pour holy passions".<sup>58</sup> Franck's followers thus managed to sanitise and frame the pagan tale of erotic love within a Christian discourse: Derepas defined the work as a Christian transposition of the story of Psyche and Eros, the latter portrayed as an angelic seraphim rather than a pagan god who leads Psyche towards the light; and d'Indy later described the climax of the work as Psyche's apotheosis and redemption.<sup>59</sup> In their reappraisals of *Psyché*, these men thus equated sexual and spiritual fulfilment for women in a similar way to Anatole France at the moment of Thaïs's supreme *jouissance*, her death. Such a Christianised view of Franck's work presents striking parallels with *Thaïs*. Both works concern a beautiful woman from an ancient civilisation forming part of the 'cradle of humanity' (Greek and Egyptian), the foundation of modern European society; both can be seen to redeem and sanctify that pagan woman who becomes the personification of the human soul; both Franck and Massenet are seen to identify Eros as the God of love rather than a god of love by mapping pagan ideals onto the spiritual and Christian plane. In both works, the orchestra plays a crucial role in the dramatic structure. Indeed, there are no soloists in *Psyché*; the orchestra is given the most important role, Vincent d'Indy writing: "it translates the élans, the regrets, the final joy of Psyche, the invisible yet fertile action of Eros."<sup>60</sup> The *Méditation* fulfils the same function for Thaïs and Christ.

Climactic sensations procured through orchestral music, used to express that which was unconscious and inexpressible through words or stage representation, were thus aligned with sexual and spiritual orgasm. As the unconscious was deemed a feminised realm of irrational and anarchical thoughts, and the equation of spiritual and physical elation particularly applied to women, so, by association, can the 'nonsensical' communicative language of orchestral music be seen as an effeminate

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to receive the lowly, echoes Vincent d'Indy's description of the way in which Franck portrayed Christ in his religious works, and particularly, *Les Béatitudes*. See D'Indy, *César Franck*, 186-210.

<sup>58</sup> "O blanche sœur des lys, plus douce que l'aurore et plus belle que la beauté, ne sens-tu pas un doux désir éclore dans ton sein agité?" or "Il va venir, l'époux mystérieux, dans ton sein virginal, verser de saints délires". I am greatly indebted to Joël-Marie Fauquet for these pertinent insights into the life and work of César Franck and the reactions of his pupils and followers.

<sup>59</sup> D'Indy, 155: "C'est l'apothéose, l'amour qui n'a plus à croire qui va et qui possède. C'est une véritable Rédemption." D'Indy's 'redemption' is, indeed, none other than that of the antique myth.

<sup>60</sup> D'Indy, 156: "il traduit les élans, les regrets, la joie finale de Psyché, l'action invisible mais féconde d'Eros."

compositional technique. Indeed, the subsequent Christianisation of Franck's work was also an effort to bring it back within the realm of patriarchy, to 'rescue' it from a feminised and corrupted art. The symphonic interludes in *Thaïs* were also condemned by certain critics as a decadent, effeminate element in Massenet's compositional palette (as discussed in chapter three), and this argument was fuelled by the Wagnerian allure assumed by orchestral music in opera. Thaïs's *Méditation* runs the whole gamut of these ideas interrelated in symbolist aesthetics: orchestral music unlocks the expression of Thaïs's unconscious thoughts which carry her towards climax. And yet, whilst the vision scenes and *Symphonie des amours d'Aphrodite* tend to focus on and, to some extent, fetishise Thaïs's body through orchestral music, the *Méditation* concentrates on voice.<sup>61</sup> Ill at ease and unconvinced by Athanaël's promise of eternal life, Thaïs sends him away; the curtain falls and the *Méditation* begins. When the curtain rises on a new day, Thaïs approaches Athanaël, who has kept guard on her doorstep all night, and says "Father, God has spoken to me through your voice! Here I am! [...] Your word remained in my heart like a divine balm; I prayed, I cried! It shed great light on my soul: having seen the emptiness of voluptuous pleasure, I come to you as you commanded it."<sup>62</sup> Thaïs's words thus pose the question as to whether the famous *Méditation* and its violin solo symbolise the voice of God or the voice of Athanaël at work in Thaïs's soul, or whether, indeed, it may be read as symbolising Thaïs's own voice which, free from human ties, rejoices in its own mystical ecstasy. [Example 2.]

The conservative critic Camille Bellaigue was scandalised by Massenet's lightweight solution to a highly poignant moment in the drama.<sup>63</sup> Bellaigue seemed, however, to

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<sup>61</sup> See Smart, 'The Silencing of Lucia', 127, footnote 18. Smart remarks that Lucia's appearances in Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* are mostly introduced by long orchestral preludes. The first expression of Lucia's musical presence is thus communicated by the orchestra, not by her voice, and her body, isolated from her voice, is fetishised. The same is true of Thaïs's body, only to an even higher degree than Lucia, due to the voyeuristic nature of her first appearance in the Act I vision scene.

<sup>62</sup> Thaïs: "Père, Dieu m'a parlé par ta voix! Me voici! [...] Ta parole est restée en mon cœur comme un baume divin; j'ai prié, j'ai pleuré! Il s'est fait en mon âme une grande lumière: ayant vu le néant de toute volupté, vers toi je viens ainsi que tu l'as commandé."

<sup>63</sup> Bellaigue, 'Revue musicale. Théâtre de l'Opéra: *Thaïs*, opéra en trois actes et sept tableaux, tiré du roman de M. Anatole France par M. Louis Gallet, musique de M. Massenet', *La Revue des deux mondes*, CXXII, 1 April 1894, 702-7, at 705: "This abandonment, the fundamental event of the work, this crisis of soul, when the former Thaïs dies and a new Thaïs is born, by what has M. Massenet translated it? By a frail violin solo. «Meditation» he says. Oh no! Reverie at the most and so lightweight! Besides that, the elegant turn and contour of phrase is Chopinesque. But it is so little for such a great subject, for such a serious moment! Of such a battle and such a victory, of all this woman

miss the point of the story as written by France and adapted by Gallet and Massenet: Thaïs's conversion and marriage to Christ is not painful. It is no courageous victory; there are no great changes to be made, no clean breaks with the past, because Thaïs's natural and universal appreciation of the beauty in life is merely transferred from the physical to the spiritual plane. Thaïs sees no fundamental difference between carnal and Christian love; she passes from one to the other with utmost ease. The *Méditation* thus needed to evoke a new door opening in Thaïs's soul but had no need to portray a dramatic or scornful rejection of one way of life and an ecstatic yet difficult acceptance of another.

Example 2

MÉDITATION

Andante religioso  $\text{♩} = 60$

Violin Solo

The first system of the musical score for 'Méditation' features a violin solo in the upper staff and piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The tempo is marked 'Andante religioso' with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The violin part begins with a long, sweeping melodic line, marked with a fermata and containing triplets and quintuplets. The piano accompaniment is marked 'pp très soutenu' and consists of a steady, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

The second system continues the musical score. The violin part features a fermata over a measure, followed by a dynamic marking of 'p' (piano). The piano accompaniment includes a dynamic marking of 'sf' (sforzando) and a 'rall.' (rallentando) instruction. The system concludes with a key signature change to one flat (F) and a Roman numeral 'b VI' indicating the sixth degree of the scale.

once loved and of that she now loves, of that which she was and of that which she is become, what a feeble representation! What a nocturne for such a night! There is nothing more here than a gracious offertory for society weddings, a distinguished accompaniment for the bridesmaids' collection; it is not this romance that should have been played at the painful and sacred marriage of a sinner before Jesus Christ." ["Cet abandon, péripétie capitale de l'œuvre, cette crise d'âme, où meurt l'ancienne Thaïs et naît une Thaïs nouvelle, par quoi M. Massenet l'a-t-il traduite? Par un frêle solo de violon. «Méditation» dit-il. Oh! Non, rêverie tout au plus, et si légère! La phrase est d'ailleurs élégante, tournée et contournée même à la Chopin. Mais que c'est peu de chose pour un si grand sujet, pour un si grave moment! D'un pareil combat et d'une pareille victoire, de ce qu'aima cette femme et de ce qu'elle aime à présent, de ce qu'elle fut et de ce qu'elle devient, quelle faible représentation! Un tel nocturne pour une telle nuit! Il n'y a ici qu'un gracieux offertoire de mariage mondain, accompagnement distingué de la quête des demoiselles d'honneur; ce n'est pas cette romance qu'il eût fallu jouer aux noces douloureuses et saintes d'une pécheresse devant Jésus-Christ."]

Bellaigue preferred the subsequent scene in which Thaïs confided her spiritual experience to Athanaël over an oriental-style melody.<sup>64</sup> The orchestral texture comprises a number of exotic signifiers: a sinuous oboe melody of narrow ambit that continuously turns in on itself and which is accompanied by two ostinato figures played by an 'arab drum' and a 'clavier de timbres'. Each instrumental part seems to conform to its own separate metric pattern giving the music a sense of rhythmic, as well as harmonic and instrumental, oriental 'otherness'.<sup>65</sup> [Example 3.] This off-stage music is meant to portray the small, orgiastic hours of a decadent party taking place in a house at the back of the stage.<sup>66</sup> Far from musically reinforcing Thaïs's repentant

Example 3

The musical score for Example 3 is titled "Allegro Moderato" with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 76 (♩. 76). It is in 3/4 time and consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Oboe, showing a melodic line with a long slur. The second staff is for the Crotales, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The third staff is for the Clavier de timbres, with a similar rhythmic pattern. The bottom staff is for the arab drum, showing a simple rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *mf*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs.

disclosure, therefore, Massenet subjugates its Christian intensity and explicitly links Thaïs's new spiritual experience with her former physical ones.<sup>67</sup> Bellaigue, however, interpreted this music another way, and was willing to accept such exotic and erotic mysticism as conveying Christian sentiment, in a similar way to Franck's

<sup>64</sup> Some critics mentioned this passage's inspiration as being the 'Rue du Caire', seen at the 1889 Paris World Exhibition. See M. O., 'Autour de la pièce. La mise en scène - Les costumes de Mlle Sanderson', *Le Matin*, 17 March 1894. J. Chrysale, in *La Liberté* (17 March 1894), referred to it as Tunisian Café music. The *Exposition de 1889. Guide bleu du Figaro et du Petit Journal avec 5 plans et 31 dessins*, (Paris: *Le Figaro*, 26 rue Drouot, 1889) refers to the resounding "guzlas, les tambourins et les tarboucks" in the café on the 'Rue du Caire' (182). The Tunisien café is also evoked (252): "Le fond de cette cour est occupé par une suite de boutiques diverses, et un restaurant tunisien qui s'ouvre sur un café concert d'un caractère tout particulier, et dans lequel des danseuses de Tunis dans leur costume élégamment étrange donnent le spectacle de leurs danses bizarres exécutées au son de cette musique arabe d'une régularité si pénétrante."

<sup>65</sup> Gérard Condé, 'Commentaire littéraire et musical', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, (1988), 24-64, at 49.

<sup>66</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by the orgy that takes place at the end of France's banquet scene and also by the decadent Nicias's presence at this party. The indolent and decadent nature of the oriental accompaniment was implied by Boisard in *Le Monde illustré* when he referred to it as "entendu comme dans un rêverie de haschich," much like Hérode's 'Vision fugitive'. See A. Boisard, "Chronique musicale", *Le Monde illustré*, 24 March 1894, 183-6.

<sup>67</sup> Gallet, in 'Théâtre. Musique', *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1 April 1894, 643-8, at 647, defined this moment as an "opposition des plus piquantes et des plus séduisantes".

followers with *Psyché*, and similar to much of the music in *Hérodiade*.<sup>68</sup> Bellaigue noted that at this point, God, choosing neither the place nor time to reveal himself, made himself heard by those that listened among the familiar and banal sounds of the street.<sup>69</sup> For Bellaigue, the *couleur locale* of the oriental-style accompaniment to Thaïs's repentance merely proved the transcendent nature of her conversion and the oblivion of her past life. However, it is the *Méditation* which represents Thaïs's conversion, and this musical representation of Thaïs's exploration of universal beauty and its translation in the Christian religion needed no local colour. In a similar stance to that taken by the painter Eugène Fromentin for representation of biblical subjects, Massenet seemed to avoid the addition of musical exoticisms in the *Méditation*, for the introduction of local or historical colour to this religious scene could only close off the realm of imagination and mysticism, of spiritual truth of the Christian faith.<sup>70</sup> The expressive force of the *Méditation*, read as Thaïs's internal vocalisation of mystical elation, could only be belittled by *couleur locale*.<sup>71</sup>

The *Méditation religieuse* makes particular pivotal and climactic use of the chord based on the flattened sixth. Susan McClary identifies a shift in tonality to that based on the flattened sixth in nineteenth-century opera as a musical 'sign', which is

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<sup>68</sup> Bellaigue was an ardent admirer of Massenet's *Marie-Magdeleine* (as mentioned in chapter two), a work also greatly appreciated by Franck. My thanks go to Joël-Marie Fauquet for this insight. It would have been interesting to learn of Franck's opinion of *Thaïs*, but Franck died in November 1890, a little more than three years before the première of Massenet's opera.

<sup>69</sup> Bellaigue, 706: "Cette scène, la meilleure de l'ouvrage, comprend d'abord un dialogue à mi-voix qu'un orchestre invisible accompagne, puis une cantilène, vraiment exquise, de Thaïs. Tandis que très bas, l'un avec mansuétude, l'autre avec humilité, tous deux avec ferveur, l'apôtre et la pénitente s'entretiennent de Dieu, de retraite et d'expiation, au loin une vague musique d'Orient tinte, ronfle et bourdonne. Détail encore sans doute, et mince détail. Oui, mais qui cette fois ne manque pas de valeur psychologique, ou plus simplement morale. Ici le sérieux, la solennité du dialogue musical donne quelque grandeur à l'âme, et pour ainsi dire au dedans des personnages. Dès lors, il importe peu que les dehors soient petits. Il convient peut-être même qu'ils le soient, et que Dieu, ne choissant ni le lieu ni l'heure, se fasse entendre de ceux qui l'écoutent parmi les bruits familiers de la ville et jusque dans la banalité de la rue."

<sup>70</sup> See Eugène Fromentin, *Une année dans le Sahel*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 179; id., *Un Été dans le Sahara: Voyage dans les oasis du Sud algérien en 1853*, (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1992), 61. Théophile Gautier expressed similar opinions in his *Les Beaux Arts en Europe*, (1855), II, 19, cited in Malcolm Warner, "The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity and Islam", in Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East*, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984), 32-9, at 34.

<sup>71</sup> Philippe Blay addresses the notion of musical exoticism in relation to the *Méditation*, eloquently writing: "Voici donc le véritable moment d'évasion de l'opéra – sorte de romance transsubstantiée en prélude mystique –, où la lyrique dramatique cède le pas à un chant sans paroles. L'imagination de chacun peut s'étendre à loisir sur cette surface recueillie, porteuse d'un voyage hors du spectacle. Les figures de l'exotisme ont laissé la place à un imaginaire purement musical." See Blay, 'De l'exotisme à la révélation', Leonard de Vinci Opéra de Rouen programme, saison 1998-1999, 33-5, at 34.



semantically interpretable and discloses dramatic truth,<sup>72</sup> for the entry into the world of the unconscious. She writes:

Admittedly, such chromatic modulations were relatively common in music of this time. Yet their frequency does not lessen their significance, but rather serves as an index of how effective such rhetorical devices were — and still are. The flat-six modulation creates a sudden, dramatic shift into what is perceived as an alien region: a realm of fantasy, illusion, nostalgia, unreason or the sublime, depending on semiotic context.<sup>73</sup>

Preceding the *Méditation* in Massenet's opera, the flattened sixth chord is always used to underpin and signify the state of eternal life.<sup>74</sup> In the *Méditation* itself, this chord is used as a pivot in order to repeat the opening eight-bar melodic phrase without the introduction of a traditional cadence, and permits a sensual chromatic step movement in the violin melody.<sup>75</sup> [See Example 2.] However, its critical positioning here, similar to that of Donizetti's use in *Lucia di Lammermoor* as the key to the unconscious of nineteenth-century opera's most notorious 'mad woman' (in Lucia's "Spargi d'amaro pianto"), is also the key to the more complex harmonic structure and rapturous violin theme that follow during the rest of the movement. The chord of the flattened sixth opens the door in Thaïs's soul through which she will enter that sublime alien region, the eternal kingdom; she passes easily from the

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<sup>72</sup> Frits Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 316. Noske defines the musico-dramatic signifier as "a musical unit which stresses, clarifies, invalidates, contradicts or supplies an element of the libretto". Susan McClary's work has always maintained that "music is a socially organised enterprise — is [...] "condemned to meaning." Its structures, narratives, semiotic codes and so on are developed, negotiated, resisted, transmitted, or transformed within a completely social arena." See McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 102. More recently, the analyst Craig Ayrey presented a collection of analytical articles with a "common focus on the re-interpretative ('translation') or structural strategies ('rhetoric') in the works analysed. That is to say, a recurrent theme of the essays is the interpretative transformation of concepts, ideas and forms that (as [Arnold] Whittall always reminded us) constitutes the heart of the compositional process. Composition both employs interpretative strategies of its own and is located in an interpretative context. Music analysis seeks to reveal these dimensions, with which it began and ends." See Craig Ayrey & Mark Everist (eds.), *Analytical Strategies and Musical Interpretation. Essays on nineteenth- and twentieth-century music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32.

<sup>73</sup> McClary (93) is writing with relation to the madness of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A similar modulation occurs in the highly popular and influential French opéra-comique, Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche* (1824) as, in Act III, the hero George Brown enters what is, unbeknown to him, his own family castle and begins to vaguely recognise his surroundings. He sings: "D'où peut naître cette folie? D'où vient ce que je ressens? Dame blanche, est-ce ta magie qui vient encor troubler mes sens?"

<sup>74</sup> For example, the flattened sixth chord makes its third appearance during Thaïs's 'mirror aria'. In the final cadential passage of the A section of this aria that repeats the words "Dis-moi que je suis belle et que je serai belle éternellement!" ["Tell me that I am beautiful and that I shall be eternally beautiful!"], the flattened sixth chord is used as a prolonging device and supports a reiteration of the word "éternellement". In this context, the chord may indeed be seen to evoke the illusion of eternal youthfulness, with all the erotic power that bestows, propagated by Thaïs's nostalgia for her fading beauty.

<sup>75</sup> It is due to this chord's pivotal qualities at this point that Rodney Milnes refers to the *Méditation* as "potentially unending". See Milnes, 'Massenet', *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 256-62, at 258.

physical to the spiritual manifestation of universal desire as if, having exhausted the pleasures of the flesh, wealth and glory, it was the promise of new and greater pleasures that attracted her.<sup>76</sup>

So does the violin melody of the *Méditation* symbolise Thaïs's own ecstatic voice? Roland Barthes, writing on the relation between the voice and string instruments, supports such a reading and manages to capture the essence of the *Méditation*. Barthes wrote:

One would say that the human voice is all the more present when it has delegated itself to other instruments, strings: the substitute becomes more real than the original, the violin and the cello "sing" better — or to be more exact, sing *more* than a soprano or a baritone, because, if there is a significance to sensitive phenomena, it is always in displacement, substitution, in short, when all is said and done, in *absence* that it manifests itself most brilliantly.<sup>77</sup>

Barthes, however, also introduces the idea of absence, of displacement, of delegation, and by extension, of non-participation by the actor. Thaïs does not sing at the *Méditation*'s first hearing (only a wordless chorus sings at the reprise of the opening theme), perhaps in an act of abstinence. Ingrid Sykes has shown that music-making among nineteenth-century French women's religious communities was akin to eucharistic devotion. In the Parisian community of Auxiliatrices, a tradition of ascetic and self-sacrificial practices imposed abstinence from communion. The *Salut* service, during which the eucharist was often displayed but not partaken of, created an exhilarating experience in itself which foreshadowed and prepared the nuns for the true moment of religious ecstasy during communion with Christ. Due to the images of the sacred heart contained within the nun's devotional music-making, as well as other traditionally religious musical symbols such as reference to Saint Cecilia and angelic choirs, God-given musical talent was an essential medium through which nuns defined themselves as vessels of divine inspiration. Thus the mystical union that operated during the eucharist was also seen to be at work during performance of musical works. In the same way that the *Salut* service imposed "divine abstinence" on the nuns, so refraining from music making was regarded as a

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<sup>76</sup> See Sylvie Huel, 'Thaïs et la morale d'une époque', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, May 1988, 80-1, at 81.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Le Chant romantique', *L'obvie et l'obtus*, 253: "On dirait que la voix humaine est ici d'autant plus présente qu'elle s'est déléguée à d'autres instruments, les cordes: le substitut devient plus vrai que l'original, le violon et le violoncelle « chantent » mieux - ou pour être plus exact, chantent *plus* que le soprano ou le baryton, parce que, s'il y a une signification des phénomènes

self-sacrificial and so ultimately ecstatic act.<sup>78</sup> The *Méditation* can be read as Thaïs's way of communing with her God: she refrains from singing on its first appearance as a self-sacrificial yet ultimately exhilarating act. At the same time, Thaïs can be seen to partake of mystical union by the sublimation of her voice into a soaring violin melody.

But Thaïs's former sexual promiscuity and her mental derangement, implied by her characterisation as a hysteric, also beg a more sinister reading. A debauched lifestyle, the pox and debt had long been linked with madness.<sup>79</sup> Yet it was only in the late 1890s that Charcot was engaged in a famous debate with Alfred Fourier regarding the syphilitic origin of 'dementia paralytica', a form of madness characterised by grandiose expansive delusions and neurological symptoms of general paralysis, frequently leading to death.<sup>80</sup> In Anatole France's novel, Thaïs's body is intact after the three-month penance which leads to her death: she has lost none of the radiant beauty of the Alexandrine actress of whom Paphnuce dreams. In the opera, however, Gallet portrayed a suffering Thaïs whose beauty had been destroyed through penance. This change to the original tale may thus be read in a number of ways: as a concession to conservative (Catholic) members of the audience who demanded punishment for crimes committed; as continuing a tradition of decadent voyeurism and morbid eroticism that wanted to witness the fatal suffering of a beautiful woman which it deemed the height of female *jouissance*; or as the wasting result of syphilis that has caused Thaïs's insanity. A debauched life style was also associated with consumption in the nineteenth-century, Verdi's Violetta from *La Traviata* (1853) and Puccini's Mimì from *La Bohème* (1896) being its two most famous operatic victims.<sup>81</sup> Thaïs is described with none of the telltale signs of consumptive beauty, yet the notion that her demise is linked to her promiscuity is unavoidable, for Thaïs's body has been so much the focus of the second act that its 'disappearance' during her death scene is all the more noticeable. Like the body of a consumptive or syphilitic,

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sensibles, c'est toujours dans le déplacement, la substitution, bref, en fin de compte, *l'absence*, qu'elle se manifeste avec le plus d'éclat."

<sup>78</sup> Abstinence from musical activity is explored particularly in relation to Mère de Sainte Clothilde (alias Nelly Pasquier) in Sykes's research.

<sup>79</sup> As, for instance, in William Hogarth's series of paintings and engravings *The Rake's Progress*, dating from the 1730s.

<sup>80</sup> See Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 103-6.

<sup>81</sup> See Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 40-59.

Thaïs's body is wasted, or so the Mother Albine informs the audience, almost like a moral narrator, for Thaïs appears lying still on a bed, clothed in a shroud-like robe and wimpled.<sup>82</sup> At her death, the operatic Thaïs struck a pose similar to Charcot's images of ecstasy, both religious and hysteric, complete with long flowing robe:<sup>83</sup> this ecstatic gesture of 'spes phthisica' was clinically associated in the nineteenth century with tuberculosis.<sup>84</sup> At Thaïs's last hour, the *Méditation* returns; her inner voice enunciating her mystical ecstasy thus accompanies her death, as syphilitics' 'grandiose delusions and paralysis' accompanied their demise.

At the end of the opera, Athanaël rushes to the side of the dying and beatified Thaïs. He regrets his former conduct and embraces the carnal 'truths' of Venus. Rapturously transcendent, magnificent and oblivious, Thaïs hears nothing of Athanaël's anathemas against her sacred doctrine, but only the *Méditation* and its promises of a new dawn. [Example 4.] Now Thaïs participates in spiritual communion by unleashing her own astronomical voice. Like Lucia, Isolde and Strauss's Salome who achieve ecstasy without the presence of a (whole or living) man,<sup>85</sup> Thaïs, by making music, by singing, by making herself a vessel of divine inspiration, experiences orgasm. The *appassionato* climax of the original movement coincides with Thaïs's pre-death vision of angels, prophets and saints coming through the gates of heaven to welcome her,<sup>86</sup> and as she passes into their care, a new section begins. The theme develops sequentially, gathers momentum, and Thaïs's ecstatic vocal line sails to a celestial high D that irrevocably widens the gap between herself and Athanaël, a difference of two octaves separating their vocal lines. Thaïs's

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<sup>82</sup> A woman's hair bears powerful erotic connotations in Judeo-Christian culture and so the absence of hair, or hair loss (a symptom of syphilitic infection), deprived a woman of her sexual power. See my discussion of this issue in relation to *Salomé* in chapter two.

<sup>83</sup> Like Charcot's female patients and his image of Saint Catherine of Siena, 'Thaïs lifts her arms perpendicularly towards heaven as if to reach it' as she dies. See Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale, Thaïs, T8 (I), 45: 'Thaïs élève les deux bras perpendiculairement vers le ciel pour l'atteindre.' Two studio-taken photographs exist of this scene. Sanderson is dressed in a white flowing robe and either stands next to or is lying on a ruffled sheet-covered bed. In the first instance, she leans on the raised pillow with her left hand as if for support, whilst her right arm is raised to the sky and her eyes look heavenward. In the latter case, Sanderson props herself up on her left arm with her right arm raised, hand at face level with her index finger outstretched, and a rather vacant facial expression.

<sup>84</sup> Such as Violetta experiences just before her death. See Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 44-5.

<sup>85</sup> McClary, 101. In relation to *Salomé*, Kramer ('Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex', 277) argues that Jokanaan's severed head becomes an image and all-powerful signifier of law, culture, authority and potency—the phallus itself—rather than a Freudian image of castration.

<sup>86</sup> In a similar way to the final apotheosis and redemption of Gounod's Marguerite in "Ange purs, ange radieux, portez mon âme au sein des cieux".

frenetic vocal line then plunges to a low B below middle C but still does not intersect with that of Athanaël. He tries to partake of her ecstasy, yet throughout the

Example 4

The musical score for Example 4 is divided into three systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Thais, marked 'Andante religioso' and 'p', with the name 'THAIS' above it. The piano accompaniment is also marked 'Andante religioso' and 'pp'. The second system features Thais's vocal line with the instruction '(Dans l'extase et n'écoutant pas ce que lui répond ATHANAËL)' above it. The lyrics are 'sou - vient - il du lu - mi - neux voy - a - ge, lors - que tu m'as con - duite'. The piano accompaniment continues. The third system shows Athanaël's vocal line, marked 'ATHANAËL (avec attendrissement)' and 'p', with the instruction 'rall.' above it. The lyrics are 'ci? J'ai le seul sou - ve - nir de ta beau - té mor - tel - le!...'. The piano accompaniment also includes a 'rall.' marking.

duet the protagonists' vocal lines remain separate, each contained within its own sphere, with no interaction between them.<sup>87</sup> Like Lucia, whose vocal line "bursts into euphoric spirals of erotic transport", overspilling its bounds as "she anticipates

<sup>87</sup> Goldstrom (193-6) rather astonishingly defines Thais's ecstasy as musically staid and conservative, lacking in grandeur and the build up of tension followed by release. As with Jean's and Salomé's duets in *Hérodiade*, Goldstrom relegates this moment to the rank of aborted orgasm, citing the failure of seduction and lack of "cojoinment" between the protagonists as reasons for his argument.

reunion with Edgardo”,<sup>88</sup> Thaïs’s vocal exuberance which passes the limits of her tessitura thus far, anticipates a similar celestial reunion with Christ, Thaïs’s ultimate and triumphant lover.<sup>89</sup> [Example 5.] Scenically too, Thaïs and Athanaël remain separated. The staging book indicates:

To the *andante religioso*, Thaïs [...] says in ecstasy and not listening to what Athanaël says: Do you remember the water from the fountain. [...] Athanaël says with passion: Ah! I only remember [...]. Thaïs still not listening to him and in raptures says: And here is the dawn.<sup>90</sup>

Example 5

The musical score for Example 5 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Tenor (T.), the middle for Alto (A.), and the bottom for piano accompaniment. The Tenor part begins with a *rall.* marking and a dynamic of *ff*, followed by a *a Tempo più appassionato più mosso* section with a dynamic of *più f e cresc.*, and ends with a *rall.* marking and a dynamic of *sf*. The Alto part begins with a dynamic of *f*, followed by a *mf* section, and ends with a *sf* section. The piano accompaniment begins with a dynamic of *ff*, followed by a *rall.* marking and a dynamic of *ff*, and ends with a *rall.* marking and a dynamic of *sf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Mary Ann Smart remarks that musical reminiscences in the mad scene, and particularly the semantic rigidity of the orchestral quotation of the melody from Lucia’s love scene with Edgardo, reinforces the frame of plot placed around Lucia’s madness, overpowering her voice and coloratura with orchestral force that is external both to her and to the situation.<sup>91</sup> The *Méditation* may be seen to represent even greater “semantic rigidity” as reminiscence, but if it can be read as the orchestral fetishisation of Thaïs’s voice in mystical transport, it is exterior neither to Thaïs nor to the dramatic context. Therefore, Thaïs is saved from an

<sup>88</sup> McClary, 96.

<sup>89</sup> Of France’s original novel, Marie-Claire Bancquart (*Anatole France Œuvres I*, 1337) notes that Christ is consistently yet subtly referred to as a human man, particularly in the inference of Christ being Thaïs’s ultimate and triumphant lover.

<sup>90</sup> Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Association de la régie théâtrale, Thaïs, T8 (I), 45: “Sur l’*andante religioso*, Thaïs [...] dit dans l’extase et n’écouter pas ce que lui dit Athanaël: Se souvient-il de l’eau de la fontaine. [...] Athanaël dit avec ardeur: Ah! je me souviens seulement [...]. Thaïs toujours sans l’écouter et dans le ravissement dit : Eh la voilà, l’aurore..”

<sup>91</sup> Smart, 140.

overwhelming orchestra; indeed, for the first time she actually vocalises her inner voice and sings along with it. Unlike Lucia, whose voice remains fettered by language even when formal freedom denotes the triumph of emotion over convention,<sup>92</sup> Thaïs uses language, almost for the first time in this sense, as an alternative to her wasted body. Thus the orchestral fetishisation of her body operated through the vision scenes in the first and third acts, is replaced by her own, real-life voice. Thaïs's moments of vocal exuberance, passing the limits of her tessitura thus far, suggest her ecstatic state and liberate her voice from text in a similar way to the vision scenes and orchestral interludes.

Thaïs's death thus allows two readings of the 'moral of the story'. Her climactic vocal moments may be seen as the ultimate pre-symbolic expression of her persona as she takes leave of all that is earthbound.<sup>93</sup> But Thaïs's vocal excesses are momentary, and she is not supposed to be dangerously mad but religiously ecstatic, and it is in this way that her death may be read as a framing device after all. Like Franck's *Psyché*, Thaïs is led towards 'the light',<sup>94</sup> a redemption that, although destroying her body and sensual power, gives her powerful vocal expression as opposed to the assertion of her body or sublimated voice: in her reunion with Christ, she enters the realm of higher, rational, phallogentric culture. Many critics expected to find an opposite progression for the father of the Christian Church, i.e. a spiritual journey from (traditionally male) enlightenment into the depths of the feminised world of hysteria, irrational behaviour, sexual promiscuity and the clutches of Venus. However, as with their characterisation of Thaïs, Gallet and Massenet stuck close to Anatole France's novel, rather giving the audience an anticlerical image of a holy man corrupt from the very start, tainted by his own religion's excessive ascetism and self-repression, rather than any gradual contamination from exterior sources. Thus whilst the evolution of stereotypical figures for female characters that perturbed the

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<sup>92</sup> Smart, 127-8, 137.

<sup>93</sup> Smart (119) assesses this Foucault-influenced view of insanity and its adoption in the 1980s by feminist academics.

<sup>94</sup> In Franckian terms, or rather in terms of Vincent d'Indy's interpretation of Franck's tonal processes, the key of D major, the key of the *Méditation*, was associated with the voice of Christ and His holy and loving redemption of humanity. *Les Béatitudes*, given a posthumous première in 1891, ended in D major: "le Christ victorieux plane au dessus du monde, appelant à lui toute la foule des justes et des élus. [...] C'est alors que la tonalité de *ré majeur* [...] descend sur l'humanité régénérée comme une lumière nouvelle, et la divine Voix entonne enfin la cantique attendu de la salvation par l'Amour." See D'Indy, 210.

public imagination is reflected in *Thaïs* (in comparison to *Hérodiade*), *Thaïs*'s portrayal of the male Christian notable closely resembles the anticlerical and ambiguous characterisation of Jean Baptiste. The opera *Thaïs* is perhaps even more anticlerical than *Hérodiade*—the 1890s had seen the rise of populist, extremist, right-wing, anti-Semitic Catholicism—and, indeed, the authors had greater room for manoeuvre: whilst retelling a story from early Christian history, the opera is not a biblical one, and Athanaël's fall, already 'told' by Anatole France, was less controversial than that of Christ's precursor.

### Athanaël

France's Paphnuce is portrayed as perverted and ignorant through his excessive denial of the flesh and his failure to recognise universal beauty. As he dreams of *Thaïs*, he becomes aware that his monastic cell is populated by increasingly numerous jackals: the physical manifestations of his concupiscence and sin. The opera's Athanaël also lives the hermitic life, surrounded only by his fellow monks in the Thebaid desert. Whilst this religious community is portrayed ironically in France's novel, the opera's depiction of Athanaël and his brothers is noble and edifying.<sup>95</sup> The last scene of the opera's first tableau, as Athanaël withdraws from his companions and starts off on the road to Alexandria which will lead him to *Thaïs*, was particularly appreciated by contemporary critics. Athanaël, his voice heard from progressively further offstage, sings a chant-like prayer asking God for courage on his mission. Athanaël's phrases are answered simply in close harmony by the monks left on stage as the tableau draws to its serene close.

And yet despite this semblance of religiosity, Athanaël's character and music have already been marked out as restless and unwholesome due to the influence of Venus and by his dreaming. As Athanaël explains *Thaïs*'s adherence to the "culte de Vénus" to his desert brothers in Act I, an hitherto unused musical language appears, a combination of elements exclusive to Venus: half diminished and diminished seventh chords, outlined by the woodwind, support a violin melody which chromatically ascends by means of triplet semiquaver figures. In Athanaël's abandonment of the righteous path, the effect of this motive on his own music is

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<sup>95</sup> See Alfred Bruneau in *Gil Blas*, 18 March 1894.



enlightening. It may first be seen at work during his Act I aria "Hélas!.. enfant encore" which first introduces the elements of the Venus motive when he alludes to Thaïs; chromaticism creeps into Athanaël's vocal line and triplet quavers into its accompaniment. The return of the opening musical statement, accompanying Athanaël's words "But God saved me from this courtesan, and I found peace in this desert...",<sup>96</sup> is, however, less innocent than its original counterpart. A counter-melody, introducing melodic chromaticism and triplet rhythms follows the melody and adds a sense of duality to the theme, the two melodies become intertwined. [Example 6.] The passage is then extended as Athanaël expresses the emotional tumult Thaïs provokes within him, accompanied by a dramatically chromatic harmonic language, including Venus's chromatic seventh chords (as referred to above), as well as augmented fifth chords. These procedures recall a similar yet more sensual passage from Act II of *Esclarmonde* as Esclarmonde perceives her lover's arrival for a night of carnal passion. The new elements' association with Venus/Thaïs leads one to assume that the orchestra is enunciating the unconscious and revealing nature of Athanaël's interest in Thaïs. Indeed, as Athanaël complacently drifts off to sleep to the accompaniment of this theme, expecting God to provide him with a sign to confirm and sanction his crusade, he experiences a rather different vision, that of Thaïs miming the "amours d'Aphrodite" during which all the expressive elements of Venus's music are used to the full.

Indeed, it is as much by the lurid content of his dreams as by the act of dreaming itself (that signifier of decadence as described in the last chapter) that Athanaël is seen to be corrupt and on a false mission. Unable to face the harsh ascetism of his daily reality, Athanaël, like decadent writers, seeks refuge in a world of illusion about his faith and himself.<sup>97</sup> Athanaël represses not only his desire for Thaïs but also his conscience regarding his dreams. By the fourth century A.D., the fathers of the Christian Church had begun to produce theoretical and moral writings on dreams. Tertullian, differentiating dreams from divine inspiration at the beginning of the third century, declared that the majority of dreams, especially those which were vain, immodest, deceiving, obscure and full of illusions, were sent by demons with the

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<sup>96</sup> Athanaël: "Mais Dieu m'a préservé de cette courtisane, et j'ai trouvé le calme en ce désert..."

<sup>97</sup> Elisabeth Ravoux-Rallo, 'Glissements progressifs du roman au livret', *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109, May 1988, 13-7, at 16.

intention of falsehood and deceit. Three other fourth-century fathers of the Greek and Latin Churches also set out important opinions: Saint Augustine, diagnosing two

Example 6

Athanaël

1° Tempo

Mais Dieu m'a pré-ser-vé de cet-te cour-ti-sa-ne, et

4

A. j'ai trou- vé le calme en ce dé- sert... maud- is- sant le pé- ché que

Poco più mosso.

7

A. j'au-rais pu com- met- tre! Ah! mon âme est trou- bié- e! La hon- te de Tha-

expressif

10

A. Ya et le mal quel- le fait me cau- sent u- ne peine a- mè- . . . re...

dim. più f

10

dim. p

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece by Athanaël. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line (bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system is marked '1° Tempo' and 'f'. The second system is marked 'A.' and '4'. The third system is marked 'A.' and '7', with the tempo change 'Poco più mosso.' and 'expressif'. The fourth system is marked 'A.' and '10', with dynamics 'dim.' and 'più f'. The lyrics are in French and describe a spiritual journey and confession.

sorts of dreams in similar style to Tertullian, warned of attributing meaning to dreams; Saint Ambrose believed dreams to be a sexual sin, and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, following on from Aristotle, discussed the role of physiological factors in the

development of the dreamworld, admitting that dreams could reveal certain traits of character.<sup>98</sup> Athanaël should, therefore, have been capable of deciphering the provenance of his dreams. However, he rather ignores the teachings of spiritual leaders and misinterprets Christian doctrine. Through such a portrayal of Athanaël from the start of the opera, any progression from saint to sinner was, therefore, redundant.

In his refusal to see reality, Athanaël falls victim to pride.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the opera, Athanaël demonstrates a level of possessive and aggressive language with regard to Thaïs, one greatly exaggerated in comparison to France's characterisation of Paphnuce. In Act II, when he presents himself at Thaïs's home with the intention of converting her, Athanaël actually speaks his pride and warrior-like purpose, saying: "I understood how glorious it would be for me to conquer you."<sup>100</sup> Athanaël also aims to 'conquer' Thaïs's soul, to win it over, to convert it to the 'truth'. Thus, as with the operatic Jean Baptiste, the notion of Christian humility is almost absent from the characterisation of Athanaël, which can be read as a critical statement, by the authors, on the Catholic hierarchy. Charles Marie Widor remarked upon Athanaël's lack of humility, and his over-violent and exuberant mode of expression from the start of the opera, believing that the character's monastic mysticism could have been better characterised by modesty and reserve.<sup>101</sup> This lack of restraint seems to have been a by-product of the orchestral economy Massenet applied in his handling of the role of Thaïs for Sibyl Sanderson, as described in the previous chapter. The more delicate, limpid orchestration used to accompany the intimate role of Thaïs meant that Athanaël was entrusted, or burdened with, all the more heavily orchestrated and musically grandiloquent passages.<sup>102</sup> Battling with an orchestra comprising triple woodwind, similar to that of *Esclarmonde* and all Massenet's operas after *Thaïs*,<sup>103</sup> the press termed the role of Athanaël as "crushing" and "thankless". The previous year to the première of *Thaïs*, Francisque Delmas, who

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<sup>98</sup> Jean Pierrot, *Le Rêve*, Univers de Lettres Bordas, Recueil thématique (Paris: Bordas, 1985), 33.

<sup>99</sup> France qualified the moral of his story as the "punishment of pride". See his open letter to *Le Figaro* on the eve of the *Thaïs* première at the Opéra (15 March 1894).

<sup>100</sup> Athanaël: "J'ai compris combien il me serait glorieux de te vaincre".

<sup>101</sup> Widor, 'Thaïs', *La Revue de Paris*, 1 April 1894, 217-24.

<sup>102</sup> Referred to by André Corneau in *Le Jour* (17 March 1894) and Henry Bauër in *L'Echo de Paris* (18 March 1894).

<sup>103</sup> See Gérard Condé, "Commentaire littéraire et musical", *Massenet Thaïs, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 109 (May 1988), 26-64, at 28.

sang Athanaël, had sung the role of Wotan in the French première of *Die Walküre* (in Victor Wilder's French translation) in the same theatre. This vocal 'tour de force' was also recalled in the press in order to suggest the dramatic vocal weight needed for the role of Athanaël.<sup>104</sup> And yet, despite his blustering, Athanaël is portrayed as adept only in the confusion of sensual and spiritual sentiments, like Jean Baptiste. His pride also leads him to delusions of grandeur during which it is not only his words and feelings which are confused, but also his personal identity, for he is often presented as a conflation of God and man.

When France's Paphnuce preaches Christian salvation to Thaïs, he is transfigured; Jesus is seen to speak directly to Thaïs through Paphnuce :

« And you, Thaïs, fortunate Thaïs! Hear what the saviour who is come himself says to you: it is He that speaks and not I. He says: "I searched a long time for you, O my lost sheep! At last I have found you! Do not flee me anymore. Let me take you in my hands, poor little thing, and I will carry you on my shoulders to the celestial fold. Come, my Thaïs, come, my chosen one, come and cry with me! » And Paphnuce fell to his knees, his eyes full of ecstasy. Thus, Thaïs saw on the face of the saint the reflection of the living Jesus.<sup>105</sup>

Even if Paphnuce's ecstasy is born of his own spirit, Thaïs understands his thrilling beauty as that of Christ. It is the physical, sensual Christian experience that wins her over. In the opera, Athanaël's transformation is equally sensual and contains a subtle mixture of religious and seductive musical elements, in a similar style to Jean Baptiste's message to Salomé. Athanaël first approaches Thaïs with a semblance of worldly flattery, accompanied by a harmonic language comprising woodwind, organ-sounding chords but with added-note appoggiaturas and a coquettish quintuplet semiquaver melodic figure. [Example 7.] Even Athanaël's statement of his spiritual love for Thaïs remains ambiguous—"Je t'aime en esprit, je t'aime en

<sup>104</sup> A negative side to Delmas's professional zeal, both vocal and histrionic, no doubt also aggravated the musical portrayal of a bombastic Athanaël, devoid of religious modesty and saintly virtue. It was remarked upon by several critics. Corneau (*Le Jour*) claimed Delmas's interpretation to be melodramatic and exaggerated, going as far as to say that if Delmas was not careful, even with all his talent, he would end up becoming horribly irritating. Charles Darcours (*Le Figaro*, 17 March 1894) also remarked upon his affected diction and an exaggerated pronunciation of the text. A. Boisard (*Le Monde illustré*, 24 March 1894) disapproved of Demas's overuse of stage cries which rendered his savage character all the more difficult to accept, whilst Widor (*La Revue de Paris*) nuanced this opinion, reproaching Delmas for his passionate and violent interpretation of the role from the start of the opera which negated the effect of a dramatic crescendo through the course of the work..

<sup>105</sup> See *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 784: "« Et toi, Thaïs, heureuse Thaïs! Entends ce que le sauveur vient lui-même te dire: c'est lui qui parle et non moi. Il dit: "Je t'ai cherchée longtemps, ô ma brebis égarée! Je te trouve enfin! Ne me fuis plus. Laisse-toi prendre par mes mains, pauvre petite, et je te porterai sur mes épaules jusqu'à la bergerie céleste. Viens, ma Thaïs, viens, mon élue, viens pleurer

vérité"—although the supporting hymn-like, organ-sounding chords which form a repeated plagal cadence in the woodwind seem to underline a sincere feeling and

Example 7

Athanaël

*f* (avec chaleur) *p*

Ahl je t'ai - me, Tha - is, et j'aime à te le di - re;

*fp* *fp* *p*

A. *più f* *più f*

mais je t'ai - me non com - me tu l'en - tends! Moi, je

*p* *f* woodwind

A. *p* *expressif.*

t'aime en es - prit, je t'aime en vé - ri - té.

purpose. And yet, Athanaël is unconvincing. Similar solemn chords underpin the statement of his intent regarding Thaïs, but the chromatically descending bass line this time delineates an enharmonic perfect fourth, whilst the harmonic movement from E to Ab major for Athanaël's rhapsodic conversion aria is articulated by chords based around the Neapolitan and German sixth chords of Ab major. [Example 8.] Athanaël's designs are far more complicated—being 'tainted' by a sophisticated

avec moi!" » Et Paphnuce tomba à genoux, les yeux pleins d'extase. Alors Thaïs vit sur la face du saint le reflet de Jésus vivant."

chromatic language—than at the outset. This harmonic passage underpins the phrase “I dream only of converting you to the truth”: the vocal line pauses between the words “conquérir” and “à la vérité” so that one first hears “conquer” out of context and only afterwards as part of an expression where it takes the sense of ‘to convert’. This hiatus confirms a sense of perverse seduction hinted at by the underlying chords and gives Athanaël the chance to compose himself before his description of the effect his message will have on Thaïs, preparing her for eternal life.

Example 8

The musical score for Example 8 consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature is E major, and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked *Allegro maestoso* (avec ampleur). The score includes the following lyrics and performance markings:

- System 1:** Athanaël: Je ne songe qu'à te conquérir à la vérité. (rall. assai)
- System 2:** A. Qui m'inspire de de- (avec un enthousiasme croissant) *mf*. *flute* le char bien en dehors. (*mf*)
- System 3:** A. cœur em-brasés pour qu'à ton souffle, à courti-m- me, ton cœur (un de cœur à me) *mf*.
- System 4:** A. ci... rel Qui pour-ra te li-vrer à moi. (*f*)

Chord progressions are indicated below the piano part: E, Emaj, F#7, Bb, and E9/Enharmonic German VI in Ab.

Athanaël's conversion speech is a condensed form of the one pronounced by Paphnuce in the novel. Its rhetoric is highly sensual and implies an intimate and personal, even sexual link between the monk and the courtesan:

Who will inspire the enflamed discourse which, by my breath, o courtesan, will melt your heart like wax! Who could deliver you to me! Who will change my words into a river Jordan whose spreading waves will prepare your soul for eternal life!"<sup>106</sup>

The accompanying music comprises a suave  $9_8$  flute melody accompanied by a solo string quartet and arpeggiated harps. [See Example 8.] As in Athanaël's Act I aria "Venez, Anges du Ciel!", the orchestration of this seductive aria includes bass drum and cymbals struck *pianissimo* allied with harps to evoke the rapturous celestial realm which had almost become common currency among opera composers since the finale of Gounod's *Faust* in 1859.<sup>107</sup> And yet the use of the harp here can also be seen to belong to the musical translation of dream-like ecstatic emotions, sacred and/or secular, as discussed in relation to *Hérodiade* in chapter two. Due to both Athanaël's domineering and erotic text and its musical signifiers, therefore, this passage seems to have as much to do with Athanaël's powers of persuasion and seduction as with righteous salvation.<sup>108</sup> In this way, the notions of spiritual and physical ecstasy are once again conflated, and by the self-assurance and possessiveness of Athanaël's words, his status as man or god remains ambiguous.

And yet Athanaël is troubled by his own sensuality as well as that of Thaïs, who evokes the aid of Venus to understand Athanaël's message of eternal life. The original staging book introduces the idea of magnetism—that, in spite of himself, Athanaël is hypnotised by Thaïs's mystically ecstatic evocation of Venus :

Thaïs says calmly and ecstatically: Venus seen and unseen. During this phrase, Athanaël, enchanted by Thaïs, moves imperceptibly upstage, walking backwards he slowly draws close to Thaïs as if attracted by a magnet.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Athanaël: "Qui m'inspirera des discours embrasés pour qu'à mon souffle, ô courtisane, ton cœur fonde comme une cire! Qui pourra te livrer à moi! Qui changera ma parole en un Jourdain dont les flots répandus prépareront ton âme à la vie éternelle!"

<sup>107</sup> Condé, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Only Widor, in the review following the première of *Thaïs*, addressed the problem of musically differentiating between sacred and secular love. He believed the musical language for their translation could be the same but that the intensity should be varied in order to mark the difference between them. It was for this reason that Widor desired more modesty and reserve in the character of Athanaël at the start of the opera. See Widor, *La Revue de Paris*, 1 April 1894.

<sup>109</sup> Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale, *Thaïs*, T8 (I), 27: "Thaïs dit avec calme et comme extasiée: Vénus invisible et présente. Pendant cette phrase, Athanaël, sous le charme de Thaïs remonte insensiblement la scène, en reculant il s'approche doucement de Thaïs comme attiré par un aimant."

As with his erotic dreams, Athanaël's hypnosis once again identifies him with the feminised illness of hysteria, for Charcot believed that the capacity for hypnosis was a manifestation of hysteria.<sup>110</sup> Whilst the satirical pictorial press tended to prefer to represent Thaïs as the hysteric and Athanaël as the hypnotist [as shown in Figure 2], the operatic representation turns the tables on Athanaël and equates his character with that of the prostitute Thaïs.<sup>111</sup> It is, indeed, the sensuality of Thaïs's mysticism—that 'feminine' refusal of reason—which gets the better of Athanaël's ascetic intellectual, spiritual and physical rigidity and implies his own imminent *jouissance*. However, Athanaël is abruptly awakened from his trance and comes to his senses, accompanied by the theme from his aria praising God in Act I, "You who grant mercy to our souls".<sup>112</sup> And yet, the harmonic transformation of this theme, now including musical elements associated with Athanaël's view of Venus, portrays the distressed nature of Athanaël's soul, and his following, overbearing cry of pride and vanity merely serves to terrify Thaïs. As Thaïs pleads for her life, the rhapsodic theme used to describe Athanaël's seduction returns, now a semitone higher in A major, as Athanaël softens before a petrified Thaïs. Having frightened her into vulnerability and submission, Athanaël's senses are less deranged, less challenged by Thaïs, and he enthusiastically reassures her of the possibilities of the afterlife; a new, more patient and coaxing Athanaël is revealed. As the benevolent tyrant again sings his seductive theme, which is extended and varied, Thaïs joins in, but only as Athanaël mentions that she should embrace Christ as her husband. Then Thaïs sings 'with fervour' at the top of her vocal range, feeling Athanaël's "power" at work within her soul. [Example 9.] It is his charismatic seduction and suave promises, both textual and musical, that enchant Thaïs who is, once again, touched by the sensuality of the Christian message rather than its full spiritual significance. Her natural propensity for pleasure drives her to take up Athanaël's lead, his enthusiasm and his melody, both protagonists pushing towards their respective sensual goals.

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<sup>110</sup> This subject was discussed in chapter three.

<sup>111</sup> See, however, Tézier's cartoon of the opera, entitled 'Thaïs ou la Tentation de saint Antoine à L'Opéra' (*Le Charivari*, 22 March 1894), which represents Athanaël as a sexually crazed hysteric, asserting that, becoming hysterical during his temptation, Athanaël "threatens to rape the corps de ballet", and then shows him dying of a "lightning attack of hysteria". Similarly to the way in which Athanaël's hypnosis is accompanied on stage by Thaïs's mystically ecstatic evocation of Venus, the cartoon depicts Athanaël's hysteria surrounded by hoards of scantily clad dancers, as though the blame for the sacrilege of a male saint could be attributed to the excess of female sexuality paraded around him on stage which contaminates his sex.

<sup>112</sup> Athanaël: "Toi qui mis la pitié dans nos âmes."



Athanaël

Sois à ja-mais la bien ai-mée et l'é-pou-se du Christ

*ff* (Avec ardeur)

T Ah! Je sera u-ne frai-cheur en mon

A dont tu fus l'en-ne-mi - e

T à - - me ra - vi - e, je frai - sonne et de-mou-re char - mé - - e

This most climactic of moments, that steadily gains in intensity, may thus be read as symbolising Athanaël's ultimate penetration of Thais's being, the nearest he gets and will ever get to ecstasy or to possessing her. Their intimacy is, however, greater during the Act III oasis scene duet. In his revision of the opera for the 1898 revival,

Massenet inserted an oasis tableau at the start of Act III.<sup>113</sup> The curtain rises on a scene in which Athanaël sadistically inflicts his ascetic practices for the expiation of sin on Thaïs as they cross the desert on foot to reach the convent where Thaïs will spend the rest of her days. Relenting at the sight of an exhausted Thaïs's bleeding feet, Athanaël goes in search of refreshing victuals. Thaïs, left alone, sings the following monologue :

O messenger of God, so good in your severity, bless you, you who have opened heaven's gates to me. My flesh bleeds and my soul rejoices, a light breeze bathes my burning forehead. Cooler than spring water, sweeter than honeycomb, your suave and salutary thought is within me, and my spirit, freed from the earth, already glides in your immensity! Worshipful father, bless you!<sup>114</sup>

The first sentence seems to be addressed to Athanaël, of whom Thaïs has sight while singing. However, the whole speech retains an ambiguity as to whether Thaïs is referring to Athanaël or Christ as her intercessor with God, in similar vein to France's novel. Thus, in the opera also, not only are the boundaries blurred between the sensual and the spiritual, but also between Athanaël's perception of his own identity as a god or as a man, which, in turn, influences Thaïs's view of him. Thaïs sings "My life is yours, God confides it to you. I belong to you!"; Athanaël affirms "Your life is mine, God confides it to me. You belong to me!"<sup>115</sup> Who is the guardian of Thaïs's body and soul: Jesus or Athanaël? And does Athanaël imagine his monastic vocation to include the coveting of any human being, let alone the sensual Thaïs who is destined to be a bride of Christ?

Until this stage of the opera, therefore, Gallet's language remains deliberately ambiguous with regard to the nature of Athanaël's feelings towards Thaïs.<sup>116</sup> Massenet's music, on the other hand, distinguishes and contrasts the sensual seduction of the Act II duet and the spiritual communion of the Act III oasis duet,

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<sup>113</sup> In Massenet's memoirs (*Massenet: Mes Souvenirs*, nouvelle édition commentée par Gérard Condé (Paris: Editions Plume, 1992), 206), he attributes the idea of adding an oasis tableau to the Opéra director Pedro Gailhard. Massenet was willing to do so, finishing the score in July 1897, and immediately discussed the details for the new scene with Gailhard. See Demar Irvine, *Massenet. A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 211.

<sup>114</sup> Thaïs: "O messenger de Dieu, si bon dans ta rudesse, sois béni, toi qui m'a ouvert le ciel! Ma chair saigne et mon âme est pleine d'allégresse, un air léger baigne mon front brulant. Plus fraîche que l'eau de source, plus douce qu'un rayon de miel, ta pensée est en moi suave et salutaire, et mon esprit, dégagé de la terre, plane déjà dans cette immensité! Très vénéré père, sois béni!"

<sup>115</sup> Thaïs: "Ma vie est à toi, Dieu te la confie. Je t'appartiens!" Athanaël: "Ta vie est à moi, Dieu me la confie. Tu m'appartiens!"

<sup>116</sup> The staging of the oasis duet also remained ambiguous and highlighted the couple's almost amorous intimacy. See Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale, Thaïs, T8 (I).

“Baigne d’eau mes mains et mes lèvres”. Massenet does so by writing music which corresponds to Thaïs’s point of view and state of mind. In Act II, the music follows in the vein of Massenet’s most erotically charged love duets, such as that from Act II of *Esclarmonde* or Act II of *Grisélidis*, and Thaïs’s vocal line is ecstatic. [See Example 9.] By the time she sings the Act III oasis duet, however, Thaïs has heard the *Méditation*, and has glimpsed mystical ecstasy. She is no longer preoccupied with Athanaël; her thoughts are directed to God. Thus, the oasis duet remains remarkably chaste. Its hymn-like squareness, syllabic word setting and vocal lines in parallel thirds and sixths portray a serene and converted Thaïs, and even Athanaël’s possessiveness is seen in the genial light of caring concern inspired by a desire to love, cherish and make Thaïs his own. [Example 10.] The parallel nature of their vocal lines portrays a certain closeness between the protagonists, but there is no intersection or unison between the two, just as in the final *Méditation* scene. In the Act II duet scene, the protagonists’ voices do not join together either. Massenet originally intended to join Athanaël’s voice to that of Thaïs, Athanaël’s words prefiguring Thaïs’s confession to Athanaël after the *Méditation*, “Dieu m’a parlé par ta voix.”<sup>117</sup> Such a vocal consummation of this seductive duet would have crowned the ambiguous notions of physical and spiritual ecstasy, Athanaël proudly referring to Thaïs’s conversion at the moment of musical *jouissance*. By his omission, Massenet tones down the carnal aspects of Athanaël’s seduction, leaving the full exhilarating consummation to the nonetheless sensual word of God in the *Méditation*. Perhaps, also, aware that Athanaël’s overbearing disposition and Delmas’s vocal prowess would but crush Sanderson’s voice and Thaïs’s newly awakened interest, Massenet swiftly cut Athanaël’s line from the score.

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<sup>117</sup> Condé, 46. In the autograph full score, Athanaël sings at the same time as Thaïs during eight bars (from bar 7 of Example 9 onwards, until the cadence of this passage which comes four bars after the end of Example 9) saying: “Jusqu’au jour j’attendrai ta venue. Tu viendras m’appeler et me dire: Dieu m’a parlé par ta voix.” Rather unconvincingly, Condé attributes Massenet’s suppression of these eight bars to dramatic confusion arising from the superimposition of two different texts.

Thais  
 Athanaël

Bai-gne d'eau mes mains et mes lê - vres, don - ne ces fruits, don - ne ces fruits.  
 Bai-gne d'eau tes mains et tes lê - vres, goûte à ces fruits, goûte à ces fruits.

pp dol. p dim. pp dol. p dim. pp dol. p dim.

### In Conclusion

With this anticlerical portrayal of Athanaël, the opera's authors were assured of Anatole France's approbation. In his open letter to *Le Figaro* the day before the opera's première, France focused on the composer who received unstinting acclaim in comparison to Louis Gallet, for whom the tone adopted fluctuated between guarded praise and courteous acknowledgement.<sup>118</sup> It was, however, Gallet who was the closer of the two to Anatole France, Massenet asking Gallet to mediate for him regarding historical details for the staging of certain scenes, and to introduce him to the author.<sup>119</sup> The Massenet scholar, Patrick Gillis has speculated, however, as to whether France's enthusiastic praise for Massenet was not just sycophancy destined to ensure his support, as a member of the Institut de France, for Anatole France's future candidacy for the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Indeed, this aspect was not ignored by the initiated press,<sup>120</sup> and the fact that France's heroine was playing at the Opéra during his 'election campaign' can only have given the author extra renown and prestige.<sup>121</sup> Whether his esteem was sincere and not as ironically sceptical as his

<sup>118</sup> Anatole France, 'Thaïs', *Le Figaro*, 15 March 1894. Patrick Gillis has shown that this public eulogy to Massenet was reiterated in France's private correspondence with the composer at the time of the opera's première. See his 'Thaïs à L'Opéra: Du roman à la comédie lyrique, pertes et profits', 125-6. He also remarked upon the fact that France's relationship with Gallet was closer than once reputed: the two men were in contact from June 1892 onwards, there was a considerate and kind exchange of letters in February 1894, when Gallet's wife was seriously ill, and a letter from France to Gallet during the summer of 1893 displays warmth of sentiment and esteem for Gallet's work on the libretto of *Thaïs* (124 & 130).

<sup>119</sup> Jean-Christophe Branger, 'Histoire d'une collaboration: Louis Gallet et Jules Massenet', *Massenet, Le Roi de Lahore, Hérodiade, L'Avant-Scène Opéra*, 187 (1998), 54-9, at 57-8.

<sup>120</sup> Moreno (alias Henri Heugel, Massenet's publisher), *Le Ménestrel*, 18 March 1894.

<sup>121</sup> See Gillis, 107-8. France was elected to the Académie in January 1896. Gallet, in 'Théâtre. Musique', *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1 April 1894, 643-8, affirmed that France's novel was well known, whilst other critics believed it impossible for operagoers not to have read the novel.

original novel, or whether France merely appreciated the publicity and notoriety that the opera brought him, is difficult to tell. However, both opera authors seemed to hold similar views on the interpretation of the novel as France himself, and were not prepared to merely portray a pious monk and an Egyptian temptress. Massenet wrote to Gallet: "I worked *and lived* with Anatole France's book – each word was my sustenance."<sup>122</sup> and for this, France did seem to recognise that, regarding the human element of his story, the opera conveyed his own sentiments excellently.

Indeed, religious or quasi-religious characters who, whilst devoted to the Christian cult, remain open to the cult of universal beauty, seemed to hold a similar fascination for France as for Massenet. France had published his short story *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* in *Le Gaulois* in May 1890.<sup>123</sup> The juggler Barnabé enjoys the simple, sensual pleasures of everyday life and puts his talents to the service of the Virgin Mary. He is graciously rewarded by an apparition of the Virgin herself, teaching a lesson to the more cultivated monks who criticised Barnabé's 'pagan' form of devotion as unacceptable.<sup>124</sup> France's juggler Barnabé was renamed Jean in Massenet's 1902 opera based on France's text. Attracted by the simple faith and pagan sensuality of France's *Jongleur*, Massenet and his librettist Maurice Léna created an opera that, although less ironic, remained faithful to the spirit of France's original.<sup>125</sup> With *Thaïs*, therefore, Massenet would probably have enjoyed greater favour with certain critics had he and Gallet turned France's Paphnuce into a humble and pious messenger of Christ caught in the snares of the adept, pleasure-loving harlot Thaïs, who died for sins committed. However, they chose to present Athanaël as a fallible and proud man and Thaïs as a radiant, sensual believer, even in death, assuring France's praise.

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<sup>122</sup> See Gillis, 132: "J'ai travaillé *en vivant* avec le livre d'Anatole France – chaque mot a été ma nourriture." It was precisely this sort of letter, betraying Massenet's lack of confidence in Gallet, that leads Branger, in his in-depth study of autograph letters from Massenet to Gallet held at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, to read the personal relationship between the composer and librettist as somewhat ambivalent.

<sup>123</sup> See Bancquart (ed.), 1421. Gillis (126) affirms that Massenet was a faithful reader of *Le Gaulois* and would no doubt have read there France's tale.

<sup>124</sup> *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 918-23.

<sup>125</sup> Massenet continued to compose operas in the same vein, portraying the title character of his opera *Don Quichotte* (1910) as a quasi-Christ figure on a quest for righteousness and the hand of the beautiful Dulcinée.

The operatic Thaïs is a product of her era. She not only conforms to the image of the mystical prostitute—Mary Magdalene, Aphrodite, Salammbô—which proliferated in the increasingly mystical climate of the fin de siècle, but she also shares characteristics with the ‘man eaters’ of late nineteenth-century artistic creation—Salome, Herodias, Judith. These female legends of antiquity were taken as subject material by artists who projected their concerns regarding more modern women and the changing face of sexual politics at the dawn of the twentieth century onto the characterisations of their heroines. With women’s growing freedom within society, men were increasingly forced to face the gender divide. What they saw and, perhaps more significantly, what men were forced to recognise in their own hypocritical behaviour, provoked a knee-jerk reaction, often translated in artistic creation by a form of misogyny. A need to frame women and their disruptive and disturbing behaviour, whether within contemporary medical discourse or artistic creation which focused on women of a long-gone era, was a common factor of fin-de-siècle society. Certain artists took this love/hate relationship with women as object of desire and disgust further, dealing explicitly and often harshly with social and sexual taboos for women, even rendering woman diabolical and desecrating the female body.

Anatole France clearly expressed the projection of contemporary concerns onto legendary women when he wrote of *Thaïs*:

I took the legend as it is found, in fifty lines, in the *Vies des Pères du désert*, and I developed and transformed it with a view to a moral idea. I transported Thaïs to Alexandria so that she would be near enough to Paris, London or Vienna. Around her, I reunited philosophers and theologians professing contradictory opinions.<sup>126</sup>

Thaïs could, therefore, just as easily have been a young woman of the end of the nineteenth century in any European capital. With regard to the character of Paphnuce and his untenable religious and physical position, France expressed his own rejection of religion and faith in favour of diverse philosophy and intellectual reflection as providing the fundamental principles and morals of modern society. He wrote of his novel:

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<sup>126</sup> France, ‘Thaïs’, *Le Figaro*, 15 March 1894: “J’ai pris la légende telle qu’elle se trouve, en cinquante lignes, dans les *Vies des Pères du désert*, et je l’ai développée et transformée en vue d’une idée morale. J’ai transporté Thaïs à Alexandrie pour qu’elle fût assez près de Paris, de Londres, de Vienne. J’ai réuni autour d’elle des philosophes et des théologiens professant des opinions contradictoires.”

I admit that I have not given man the definitive truth. It is generally the Absolute that they want. They want simple solutions. Those people who reflect the least are precisely those so avid for certainties. Doubt is only tolerable to cultivated minds. [...] I rounded up the contradictions. I displayed the antinomies. I advised doubt. [...] Philosophical doubt produces tolerance, indulgence, holy mercy and all fine virtues in the soul. They are the only likeable ones. The others are not worth what they cost.<sup>127</sup>

Faithful to the spirit of France's text, Massenet and Gallet's *Thaïs* engaged with and explored the workings of the unconscious and the interchangeable notions of mystical and hysterical ecstasy for women. Added to these excursions into what were perceived as feminised realms, Massenet gave importance to orchestral music, deemed a non-signifying language in the symbolist aesthetic which was 'imposed' by writers and painters, attracted to unconventional and figurative forms of communication. Orchestral music's capacity to act as a substitute for that which was inexpressible in words or on stage, and particularly the sexual act, allied it to a domain identified as female, intuitive, illogical, unreasonable, governed by nature and sex. Whilst the inclusion of orchestral music in the generally feminised genre of French opera, in comparison to canonical German symphonic works, may be perceived today as a sanitary and virile measure, the case was not so at the end of the nineteenth century in France. Orchestral music in opera's association with Wagner, and the link between Wagnerism and decadence in the French *fin de siècle*, merely led to further accusations of effeminacy and impotence in composers who were purely exploring the artistic aesthetics of their time. Indeed, this tendency to shift a musical work's communicative importance away from its libretto or programme—be it opera, opera ballet, dramatic symphony, or symphonic poem with chorus—or a composer's ability to translate the human voice and sentiments of the human soul through orchestral music presented the *fin-de-siècle* audience with an aural experience which solicited an individual's imagination and powers of comprehension, thus challenging received ideas of musical semantics.

The post-positivistic mystic Catholic revival formed a central element of *Thaïs*, in the opera's treatment of a sensual devotee in confrontation with an almost caricatural and anticlerical portrayal of a self-repressive monk. In the opera's transposing of the

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<sup>127</sup> France, 'Thaïs': "J'avoue que je n'ai pas apporté aux hommes la vérité définitive. C'est généralement l'absolu qu'ils demandent. Ils veulent des solutions simples. Ceux qui pensent le moins son précisément les plus avides de certitudes. Le doute n'est supportable qu'aux esprits cultivés. [...] J'ai rassemblé les contradictions. J'ai fait voir les antinomies. J'ai conseillé le doute. [...] Le doute

story from the narrative to the dramatic form, however, Thais is attributed a realm of activity and influence not open to her in France's novel, where she remains a muse and is 'acted', rather than 'acting', throughout.<sup>128</sup> In France's novel, the frame placed around Thais and that which threatens to destabilise not Athanaël, who is already corrupt, but society in general, is more definite. In the opera, Thais's own body and voice manage to escape briefly the silencer by usurping the control of those frames which are nevertheless placed around her deranging femaleness. Thais's body can be seen to escape through the feminised vehicle of the unconscious, and her voice through those of mystical ecstasy and orchestral music. And yet, by using her own voice, by conforming to male, patriarchal, logocentric expression, Thais may also be seen to be brought back into the fold, to have secured a position in higher, rational culture. The opera *Thais* thus exposed and dealt with contemporary social and artistic issues; the results were sometimes traditional and predictable; at other times they were ambiguous and innovative.

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philosophique produit dans les âmes la tolérance, l'indulgence, la sainte pitié, toutes les vertus douces. Ce sont les seules aimables. Les autres ne valent pas ce qu'elles coûtent."

<sup>128</sup> Bancquart (ed.), *Anatole France Œuvres I*, 1335.



## Conclusion

From the French Revolution, which had seen the unprecedented mobilisation of women as both republican revolutionaries and Catholic counter-revolutionaries, women in France were broadly categorised into two groups, both of which embodied irrationality and active refusal of (male) reason and order: the Mariannes and the Marys. These female icons were taken to heart by women, as models of idealistic behaviour, but also by men. In order to neutralise any independent and provocative traits displayed by these heroines—who were emulated by modern women—men idealised these icons, turning them into symbols of republican and/or Catholic patriarchy. Through such a transformation, men and women could be seen to support these allegorical figures for gender-specific reasons. During the Third Republic, the gap between Marianne and Mary was bridged by the ideology of republican motherhood: woman's true, 'natural' and traditional vocation was that of a pure, generative force, as a wife, a mother and educator of her children. Marianne was promoted as an earth mother, thus serving to reinforce and applaud republican patriarchy, just as Mary served as a *faire-valoir* in the Catholic system. This unification was effected in the face of evolving gender politics, with women demanding an increasingly large slice of the social, educational, legal and political cake. The *femme nouvelle*, who was perceived as having rejected female modesty and republican motherhood, thus became the plague of fin-de-siècle society. In the context of declining birth rates, fears for the health of the nation and national safety, calls for women's legal, social and political emancipation were interpreted as threats to national strength and security.

Moralists, philosophers and theologians through the course of the nineteenth century, and particularly from the Second Republic of 1848 onwards, put forward their ideals for women and their role within society. Only a handful of 'révoltées' rose to the challenge to defend their rights and position. Of course, male writers on the woman subject tended to be read by men—the more intimate details of their books were often considered unsuitable reading material for respectable women—but their ideas, principles and even laws for women's behaviour filtered into the common imagination and into women's every day lives through handbooks and manuals

written by women for women. Those who dared to speak out against such creeds were immediately classed as anti-women, like the 'new woman': that is, the emancipated, emotionally independent woman. Emancipated, deviant women were also considered to be sexually promiscuous in the context of fin-de-siècle medical research where deviancy and degeneration were intimately linked to sexuality and perversion.<sup>1</sup> As male individuality was defined and reinforced through the 'natural' arguments of female complementarity and otherness, any levelling of social division brought with it an eradication of sexual difference and female specificity, leading to not only the masculinisation of women therefore, but also to the feminisation and even the emasculation of men. The new woman was thus often defined as 'public enemy number one' by men battling to get a grip on the new order of gender politics.

The cultural media largely reflected social and political debate; and opera, combining many forms of artistic creation, often presented one of the most complex artistic translations of cultural movements and social trends. Massenet was the leading light in the Paris opera world during the 1880s and 1890s and, for French audiences in general, remained so until World War I. His œuvre and its reception reflect the changing face of the Third Republic, and sometimes his operas consciously deal with and work through social debate on women and their role in society. Following his first outright success with his grand opera *Le Roi de Lahore* at the Opéra in 1877, Massenet consolidated his reputation with *Hérodiade*. Despite the difficulties in finding a theatre to stage the work, *Hérodiade* confirmed Massenet's position as the leading French opera composer and provided him with an unique opportunity to demonstrate where his ideological and philosophical allegiances lay.

*Hérodiade* is a biblical opera. Moreover, it triumphed at its première in Brussels in December 1881, as well as in Milan just three months later, and then again in Paris in 1884, where it was given in Italian translation. Massenet's success was made possible by a number of factors. He built on the foundations laid by earlier composers who had begun to deal with biblical figures or events in more recent Judeo-Christian history. In relation to the première of Halévy's *La Juive* in 1835 it was remarked:

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<sup>1</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 191.

This new subject [...] is completely Roman, Catholic and Apostolic. Progress is more evident than ever here. For a long time mythology has been dead at the Paris Opéra; the Middle Ages had replaced mythology, the devil had taken the place of Jupiter, infernal powers had banished the clouds of subordinate divinities [...]; no more rose groves, but fine Gothic cathedrals [...]. Christianity was at last at the Opéra.<sup>2</sup>

Massenet also capitalised on a philosophical climate which rejected religion as universal faith but explored it as historical theology. This movement coincided with a wave of artistic representations of the Orient and colonial expeditions which geographically, as well as historically, located not only the Judeo-Christian religions but also Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism etc. The relationships established between religions by positivist theology meant that exotic religions were, nevertheless, often treated in much the same way as the religion that most nineteenth-century French composers knew best: Catholicism.

In his operatic translation of early Christian drama, Massenet and his librettists used this sense of exoticism and its orientalist counterpart, eroticism, to create strong drama with that obligatory theatrical machination—the love interest—at its centre. Rationalist theological research also coincided with a trend for Catholic devotional music of a rather sensual and/or sentimental nature. Indeed, this fashion went hand in hand with the development of more mystical and ritualised forms of devotion linked with what has been described as the feminisation of Catholicism in France during the nineteenth century. As early as 1846, Jules Janin wrote:

Apart from the Opera, [...] the 'beautiful people' of Paris prefer a religious ceremony, but an elegant ceremony, something that exudes pomp and dramatic splendour; [...] In Paris there is a church reputed for the brilliance of its lighting, for the perfume of its incense, for the beautiful voices of its choristers, for the number of boy choristers. One is told about the Reverend's lace, the richness of his decorations and the embroidery of his surplice as if they were the shawls and dresses of a coquette.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, 'La Juive', *L'Artiste*, IX, 1, 1835. Cited in Karl Leich-Galland, *Fromental Halévy - La Juive. Dossier de presse parisienne (1835)* (Saarbrücken: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 1987): "Ce nouveau sujet [...] est tout à fait un sujet catholique, apostolique et romain. Le progrès ici est plus visible que jamais. Depuis longtemps la mythologie était morte à l'Opéra; le Moyen Age avait remplacé la mythologie, le diable avait pris la place de Jupiter, les puissances infernales avaient chassé les nuées de divinités subalternes [...]; plus de bosquets de roses, mais de bonnes et belles cathédrales gothiques [...]. Le christianisme était enfin à l'Opéra."

<sup>3</sup> Jules Janin, *Un hiver à Paris*, Third edition (Paris: Veuve Louis Janet, 1846), 179: "Après l'Opéra, [...] le beau monde de Paris, préfère [...] une cérémonie religieuse, mais une belle cérémonie, quelque chose qui se sente la pompe et de l'éclat dramatique; [...] Il y a à Paris telle église que l'on vous cite pour l'éclat de ses lumières, pour les parfums de son encens, pour la belle voix de ses chantres, pour le nombre de ses enfants de chœur. On vous parle des dentelles de M. le curé, de la richesse de ses ornements et de la broderie de son surplis, comme on parlerait des châles et des robes d'une grande coquette." [Cited in Hervé Lacombe, *Les Voies de l'opéra français au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 102-4.] For acerbic views on the sensuality of the Roman Catholic religion in France and Belgium from a Protestant, Anglican (and daughter of a Priest) point of view, see the novels of Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (published 1849) and *Villette* (published 1853).

The exchange between the Church and the opera house, which drew ever closer to one another, led to parallels in the styles and formal procedures of their respective musics. The dramatic oratorios of Gounod were the epitome of this theatrical vein of Church music. Massenet was thus able to bring Christian history to the opera house with minimal public censorship. However, in *Hérodiade*, he accepted to set a libretto that not only toyed with the fashionable but ambiguous sentiments of sensuality and spirituality, but also perverted Christian history; through his operatic portrayal of Jean Baptiste as a lead tenor who sings ecstatic duets with the lead soprano Salomé, Jean Baptiste's position, even if ambiguous, could only be construed as that of a typical opera lover.<sup>4</sup>

While ambiguity of sentiment and musical language were acceptable to the Catholic Church, as seen by its own devotional styles and practices, the portrayal of the fall of its highest representatives was unthinkable. Both Massenet's operas *Hérodiade* and *Thaïs* were thus products of a specific vein of Catholic ideology, but like Renan's *La Vie de Jésus*, they edged further towards condemnation of the social and political clericalism of modern society. Both the operatic Jean Baptiste and Athanaël hold similar positions to those nineteenth-century priests in the confessional, as described by Monseigneur de Ségur and Abbé Lagoutte in their reactionary texts against anticlerical criticism: as God's appointed intercessor between Himself and a penitent, they are placed on a higher plane, halfway between humanity and divinity, not man and yet not God. A sincere characterisation of this type may have been valid for an infallible Jean Baptiste, which he is not. But it is surely not applicable to the character of Athanaël who not only gives in to carnal lust but who also travesties the authority and confidence invested in him. Massenet and his librettists are thus seen to reflect the untenable moral position of priests of reactionary nineteenth-century Catholicism. In the opera, Jean is elevated only to God-like status in the sight of those who surround him—Salomé and Phanael: the sacred character they adore is scarcely seen by the opera-house audience.

During the 1880s, religious mysticism infiltrated a large sector of society tired of positivist, scientific, industrial, urban society which, in its rejection of the

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<sup>4</sup> It is, perhaps, one of the reasons why Massenet made Athanaël a baritone and not a tenor.

unknowable, had established implacable laws reducing existence to intelligible facts. Such modernity was viewed as the result of an evolutionary process of civilisation, as outlined by Darwin and others, presented as a linear concept of a society progressing from a primitive to a sophisticated state. But this notion of evolution was necessarily accompanied by that of decline, and modern living was increasingly characterised as degenerate through the 1890s. The degeneracy of the nation became an *idée fixe* which was taken up and celebrated in the arts, examined and treated by doctors and decried by moralists and politicians. As a refuge from an ever more vulgar and democratic society, artists and philosophers retreated into the world of the unconscious, the comprehension of which was, nevertheless, sustained and advanced by the medical research of the modern world they were fleeing. The power of an unknowable force behind the visible world preoccupied Herbert Spencer, whilst Eduard von Hartmann was concerned with an unconscious but determined spirit that created and animated the real world.<sup>5</sup>

This interest in the workings of the human unconscious and the dream world was largely reflected in nineteenth-century operas. Following on from the conventional dream scenes that formed part of the 'merveille' tradition in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera, Bellini, Donizetti and Meyerbeer included dream narrations and apparitions in their operas.<sup>6</sup> However, the nineteenth century's preoccupations were more precisely reflected in a new treatment of the dream scene and the deranged: of Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (1849), Gerhard goes as far as to state that the Act IV 'exorcism' scene could have been imagined only by someone who had attended public exhibitions of hypnotic experiments.<sup>7</sup> With regard to *Hérode*, Massenet explored the linked areas of degeneracy and the dreamworld at the very start of their popularisation.

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<sup>5</sup> Eugen Weber, *Fin de siècle: La France à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, trans. Philippe Delamore (Paris: Fayard, 1986), 180. Hartmann's *La Philosophie de l'inconscient* appeared in a translation into French by Nolen in 1877. See in Jean-François Six, *1886 : Naissance du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 261-2. Conventional, unambiguously constructed visions appeared in such works as Bellini's *La Sonnambula* (1831), Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), Halévy's *Charles VI* (1843), Meyerbeer's *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien* (1844) and Verdi's *Macbeth* (1847).

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard, 288.

In *Hérodiade*, Hérode takes a hallucinatory stimulant to enjoy a masturbatory dream. The scourge of onanism during the nineteenth century was harshly reprimanded on moral grounds. For health reasons, however, it was also medically studied and treated, for abusive masturbation was seen to weaken and enfeeble, even to sterilise. With growing concern over the health of the nation, onanism, along with Malthusian contraceptive practices, was diagnosed as degenerate behaviour and as social pollution which must be eradicated at all costs. Hérode's characterisation thus marks him out as an active element in the degeneration process; his use of drugs to self-indulgently suppress the (male) regulator of his reason allows him to foray into the irrational and thus feminised world of the unconscious, just like the heroes of decadent literature and society. But Jean Baptiste is also depicted as an effeminate element in the opera because the sensualist, emotional sides of his character dominate his reason. Through this portrayal, modern Catholicism can also be seen to be identified with decadence. With *Thaïs*, Massenet developed these ideas, once again in conjunction with Christian history, reinforcing the perceived link between religious mysticism and modern psychiatry. Massenet and Louis Gallet turned to the dream scene for the depiction of the workings of Athanaël's imagination; Athanaël not only dreams but is susceptible to hypnosis and has transports of amorous passion whilst in this state. Thus whilst portrayed anticlerically as a decadent in a similar way to Jean Baptiste, Athanaël also demonstrates characteristics akin to Hérode. Like Hérode, Athanaël is feminised through his association with the irrational and the 'female malady' of hysteria, culminating in his fall and his conversion to the sensual, pagan and, once again, feminised doctrine of Venus. Like Jean Baptiste, Athanaël preaches a sensual message and is the victim of his own success. Both Jean Baptiste's corruption and Hérode's degeneracy are fatally projected on to Athanaël.

Decadence, explored in *Hérodiade*, was, indeed, taken much further in *Thaïs*, for the opera's overall conception belonged to symbolist aesthetics. The exploration of the dreamworld in the opera meant not only a proliferation of dream visions, but also of scenes which used alternative communicative languages. The opera was conceived with long passages of programmatic orchestral music which also included pantomime and dance. Thus the communicative importance of the opera was moved away from the libretto and towards the musical and visual spectacle. The symbolist belief in the power of 'nonsensical' music as a figurative medium capable of

expression beyond the spoken word, to express the inexpressible and the unrepresentable, and as the key to the unconscious, was exploited through the opera's symphonic interludes. Influenced by Charcot's psychiatry, Freud's burgeoning discipline of psychoanalysis and Bergson's philosophy, the opera's formal plan also demonstrates the belief that unconscious thoughts were directly translated in the brain by images, unmediated by language. In this way, *Thaïs* was comparable to other cultural products of symbolism such as Loïe Fuller's dances, which were defined as a direct physical interpretation of unconscious forces.

However, identification with the symbolist movement and the artistic avant-garde led to accusations of decadence in the press reception of *Thaïs*. The dream scenes, the orchestral interludes and pantomimic ballet were seen to weaken the dramatic structure of the work, and as compensatory material to pack out a rather slim drama. These aspects, when added to Massenet's delicacy of orchestration in the care taken over the role of Thaïs for Sibyl Sanderson, meant that the press did not hesitate to condemn the opera's design and musical content, as well as its composer, as worn out and impotent. Since the French reception of Wagner was tied up with the notion of decadence, accusations of Wagnerian tendencies implied a sense of degeneracy. Not only was the musical form of *Thaïs* influenced by Wagnerian techniques, such as the importance given to orchestral music, but also *Thaïs*'s libretto was conceived in Wagnerian spirit as a more realist translation of modern drama for the opera stage. It was also perceived as having philosophical value, like Wagner's libretti, due to the content of Anatole France's original 'conte philosophique'. Furthermore, Gallet's publication of a preface to his libretto was also associated at that time in France with Wagner's opera libretti and their translations, which demanded an explanatory preface from the translator/author. Thus Gallet's libretto provoked a barrage of comments and anti-Wagnerian criticism which contributed to the image of an opera conceived by two decadent artists.

Massenet shared the common belief that his era was decadent, and equally made the link between Wagnerism, decadence and female hysteria. The composer Charles Koëchlin, who studied with Massenet at the Paris Conservatoire, reports Massenet to have said :

*Wagnerians are exclusive admirers: society women who have an uncut score of Tristan on their piano and who secretly go to hear the lovesongs of Loïsa Puget... There will be a reaction. Those of us who are at the sunset of our lives, we will perhaps not see it, but you will... And these women end up becoming ill, neurotic. They only continue to live for this extreme artistic jouissance, they become cruel.*<sup>8</sup>

Here, Massenet demonstrates the typical, fin-de-siècle view that women who neglected their homes and families, chasing after ever more exhilarating experiences (whether artistic or otherwise), lose those natural fundamentals of female behaviour: modesty, gentleness and kindness. The quest for pleasure, particularly outside of the home, leads to mental derangement which brings with it a heightened propensity for ecstasy. Such opinions were, of course, a reaction to the new, self-assertive woman who displeased and deranged the senses. These women's diagnosis as hysterics was a means by which doctors and artists managed to sanitise both women and the society within which they lived and moved.

Massenet's treatment of the female characters in both *Thaïs* and *Hérodiade* remained conventional and true to stereotypical figures of perceived female behaviour. His portrayal of Thaïs thus developed out of men's complicated relationship with women in the changing sexual politics of the late-nineteenth century which saw women characterised in art as objects of both unbridled desire and unprecedented disgust. At a time of ideological *ralliement* between the Church and the State at the beginning of the 1890s, both sacred and secular groups witnessed a new interest in mysticism and the cult of the invisible. Links between mystical ecstasy and sexual orgasm for women had long been established in the common understanding, but nineteenth-century European medical research firmly added hysterical seizure to this category, creating a pigeonhole in which mystic, sexually emancipated, or even merely provocative, women could be placed and labelled hysteric. The figure of the mystical prostitute who was both man's salvation and his downfall—such as Thaïs—was,

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Koëchlin, 'Souvenirs de la classe de Massenet (1894-1895). Suite', *Le Ménestrel*, 15 March 1935, 89-90, at 90: "*Les Wagnériens sont des admirateurs exclusifs: femmes du monde qui ont sur leur piano la partition de Tristan, non coupée, se cachant pour aller entendre des romances de Loïsa Puget... Il y aura une réaction. Nous qui sommes au soleil couchant, nous ne la verrons peut-être pas, mais vous verrez... Et ces femmes finissent par devenir des malades, des névrosées. Elles ne vivent plus que pour cette aiguë jouissance artistique, elle deviennent cruelles.*" Loïsa Püget (1810-1889) composed over 300 *romances* from the 1830s onwards which were highly popular due to her frequent performances of them in Parisian salons. See Judy S. Tsou's article on her in Julie Anne Sadie & Rhian Samuel (eds.), *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (London: MacMillan, 1994), 378-9.



therefore, just as much a creation of the common (male) imagination as the Mary and Marianne-type figures posited by Michelet.

Indeed, in *Hérodiade*, Michelet's heritage looms large: Salomé is the perfect, submissive clerical devotee and defender in the face of civic (republican) authority; Hérodiade is an independent and active campaigner in her own interest, which marks her out as equally dangerous to civic authority and to the passive role she is expected to play within it. As Athanaël combines characteristics of both Jean Baptiste and Hérode, so Thaïs appears as the fin-de-siècle sublimation of both Salomé and Hérodiade. The potentially dangerous symbols of Marianne and Mary were tamed by their unification over the course of the 1880s and 1890s in order to reinforce their representation of patriarchal regimes rather than female activism. In the same way, Salomé's faith and Hérodiade's emancipation are merged in Thaïs, who represents the Christian mystic, assertive of her sexuality. In *Hérodiade*, the two leading female characters represented the dangers women presented to social harmony through the opera's exploration of faith, clericalism, political activity, irrationality and motherhood. Salomé was posited as a reactionary female force while Hérodiade embodied the new woman. In *Thaïs*, these symbolic representations are combined to create an idealised figure of female piety and sexuality in the face of growing feminist unrest with Third Republican society's provision for women.

During the nineteenth century in France, opera was capable of exploring the most burning social and political questions. The medium's combination of music, literature, theatre, dance, mime, fine art and *haute couture*, backed up by an up-to-the-minute technical apparatus, allowed opera a privileged position from which a librettist and a composer, and to a lesser extent any of the numerous creative collaborators, could express their opinions on any number of issues, ancient or modern, and often both at the same time. Over his career, Massenet enjoyed working with a great number of librettists, but despite this heterogeneity his operas indirectly but invariably spoke to his audiences of his own view of contemporary society. He frequently dealt with religious subjects, betraying a penchant for scenarios which mingled pagan and Christian mysticism, sensuality and spirituality, worldly pleasure and divine redemption. Within this decadent context, his male characters were often portrayed as weak, indecisive and subject to the influence of the woman opposite

them, their object of desire. Whilst Massenet provided his audiences with a nuanced portrait of his female characters, they were very much products of Massenet's own era, whatever their historical 'reality' might be. Throughout his *œuvre* Massenet thus demonstrated a desire to be in the front line of high-quality artistic creation, but also of social and political debate. His anticlericalism was obvious, as was his respect for the philosophical tenets of a modern and humanist republic and the moral principles derived from them. His interest in and insatiable appetite for literature and the arts in general was translated by the breadth and variety of his operas. Due to the vibrancy of Massenet's intellect, his operas provide us today with a valuable window on *fin-de-siècle* French society.

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Appendix 1

*Hérodiade*: Comparative table of the structure of the première and definitive versions.

Première version 3 Acts, 5 Tableaux			Definitive version 4 Acts, 7 Tableaux		
ACT	SCENES	TABLEAU	SCENES	ACT	
I	La Cour extérieure du Palais d'Hérode 1-4	I (1 <sup>st</sup> )	I	La Cour extérieure du Palais d'Hérode 1-4	I
	∅	∅	II (1 <sup>st</sup> )	La Chambre d'Hérode 5-6	II
	La Place de Jérusalem 5	II (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	III (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	La Place de Jérusalem 7	
	∅	∅	IV (1 <sup>st</sup> )	La Demeure de Phanuel 8	III
II	Le Saint Temple 6-9	III	V (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Le Saint Temple 9-12	
III	Le Soutterain 10	IV (1 <sup>st</sup> )	VI (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Le Soutterain 13	IV
	La Grande Salle du Palais 11-12	V (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	VII (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	La Grande Salle du Palais 14-15	

Appendix 2 *Thaïs*: Comparative table of the structure of the première and definitive versions.

Première version 3 Acts, 7 Tableaux			Definitive version 3 Acts, 7 Tableaux		
ACT	SCENES	TABLEAU	SCENES	ACT	
I	Thébaïde	I	I (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Thébaïde	I
	Alexandrie	II (1 <sup>st</sup> )	II (2 <sup>nd</sup> )		
II	Interlude: Symphonie des Amours d'Aphrodite			∅	II
	Chez Thaïs	III (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	III (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Chez Thaïs	
	Interlude: Méditation religieuse			Interlude: Méditation religieuse	
	La Place publique	IV (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	IV (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	La Place publique	
	∅			Ballet	
	∅	∅	V (1 <sup>st</sup> )	L'Oasis	
III	Thébaïde	V (1 <sup>st</sup> )	VI (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Thébaïde	III
	Ballet de la Tentation	VI (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	∅	∅	
	Vision de Thaïs			Vision de Thaïs	
	Interlude: Course dans la nuit			Interlude: Course dans la nuit	
	La Mort de Thaïs	VII (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	VII (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	La Mort de Thaïs	

It seems that in the alterations made to the opera during the final rehearsals and the first run of performances, the Alexandria tableau was already played as the second tableau of Act I, and the *Symphonie des Amours d'Aphrodite* was already cut. The (undated) printed staging book distinguishes between the grouping of scenes in the first edition of the printed score and how the opera 'should be' played, presenting the Alexandria tableau as part of Act I, and making no mention of or provision for the *Symphonie des Amours d'Aphrodite*:

La mise en scène s'adapte avec la représentation de l'Opéra. La partition 1<sup>ère</sup> édition n'est pas divisée de même — c'est-à-dire que le 1<sup>er</sup> acte (à l'Opéra) a deux tableaux La Thébaidé – La Terrasse et le 2<sup>d</sup> acte a deux tableaux La Chambre de Thaïs et la Place. Le 3<sup>ème</sup> acte a deux tableaux – si l'on supprime le ballet (comme à l'Opéra) La Thébaidé – Le Monastère des Filles Blanches.<sup>1</sup>

It seems, therefore, very likely that the Alexandria tableaux was played as part of the first act from the première of the opera, as Steven Huebner claims on the strength of the staging books and reviews of the first performance.<sup>2</sup> However, in my own extensive research of the press reception of the opera, this configuration is mentioned by only one critic, Auguste Goulet in *Le Soleil* who notes of the première:

Comme on a jugé bon de mettre ici un entr'acte [après le tableau d'Alexandrie], la symphonie a été reportée en tête du tableau suivant où elle n'est plus qu'un prélude incompréhensible et par suite démesurément long.<sup>3</sup>

The *Symphonie des Amours d'Aphrodite* seems, therefore, to have been played as a prelude to the second act, an interval robbing it of its dramatic significance.

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<sup>1</sup> *Thaïs*, comédie lyrique en 3 actes & 7 tableaux de Louis Gallet d'après le roman d'Anatole France. Musique de J. Massenet (Paris: Heugel, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111.

<sup>3</sup> Clair Rowden, *Jules Massenet. Thaïs. Dossier de presse parisienne (1894)* (Heilbronn: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2000), 179.

## Appendix 3

### *Hérodiade Synopsis*

#### **Act I – First tableau**

**Scene 1**      A courtyard before Hérode's palace.

The assembled Jews are arguing amongst themselves and are placated only by the entrance of Phaniel, whom they respect. He compels them to put aside their differences and to unite against Roman oppression and in recognition of the "immortal voice" expounding the values of "love, forgiveness and eternal life". Salomé happens upon Phaniel. Salomé, unlike Phaniel, is unaware of her mother's identity and she expresses her distress that her search for her mother has been fruitless. Salomé tells of the comfort she finds in the presence of Jean-Baptiste.

#### **Scenes 2-3**

Hérode seeks one of his dancers, in fact Salomé, with whom he is infatuated. Hérodiade interrupts his reverie, demanding vengeance for the insults she has sustained from Jean. Indignant yet persuasive, Hérodiade asks for Jean's head but Hérode refuses her request, realising Jean's potential influence with the Jews whom he hopes to ally to his plan to oust the Romans and declare himself emperor. Hérode's indifference to Hérodiade's seduction leads Hérodiade to believe that her husband has a mistress. Jean arrives to continue his tirade of insults against Hérodiade. The royal couple flee his presence.

#### **Scene 4**

Salomé joins Jean and declares her love for him. Jean reluctantly rejects her advances, describing his more lofty destiny. Salomé's panicked reaction to his rebuff provokes Jean to propose that Salomé transfigure her love into mystic ardour and that she be ready for the dawn of "new faith", "life and immortality". Salomé seems to understand, yet the scene ends as Salomé again declares her love for Jean.

#### **Act II - Second tableau**

**Scenes 5-6**      Hérode's chamber.

Hérode, surrounded by female slaves, dreams of Salomé. Once he has drunk a love potion offered to him by a young Babylonian slave-girl, Hérode's vision takes on an intoxicated realism that culminates in an exhausted sleep. Phaniel seeks Hérode out



to discuss the political situation. Having been abroad, Phaniel brings news of neighbouring foreign allies to Hérode's cause, and Hérode announces his intention to make use of Jean's influence with the people. Having ousted the Romans, Hérode intends to dispense with all religious leaders but Phaniel cautions Hérode: persecution of the "believers" will only glorify them through martyrdom.

### **Third tableau**

**Scene 7**      A public square in Jerusalem.

The Jewish hierarchy, the foreign allies and the people acclaim Hérode and his promise of freedom. All swear to fight to the death for their independence from Rome and promise to pool their various forces and arsenals. The battle rally is interrupted when Roman fanfares are heard in the distance. Hérodiade scorns the foolish public display of aggression and, taking control of the rally, swears to be able to deceive the approaching army. Vitellius, the Roman proconsul, arrives with his entourage and expresses his mistrust of the proud Jews and his suspicion of their intentions, belied by their troubled countenances. He proclaims his authority and invites the Jews to come forward with their requests which he magnanimously grants. Jean enters, accompanied by Caananite women and children singing a hosannah to the glory of the "prophet of the living God". They are headed by Salomé who is recognised by Hérode, whose reaction is interpreted by Hérodiade. Jean imposes his authority on the hushed assembly, contradicting Vitellius's authority by proclaiming that all justice is dispensed by heaven. As the act closes, the people hail Vitellius and the Caananites glorify their God.

### **Act III – Fourth tableau**

**Scene 8**      Phaniel's home.

Phaniel looks to the stars to divine Jean's true identity. Hérodiade enters and demands that Phaniel fortell the destiny of her rival for Hérode's affections. Phaniel recounts that Hérodiade's star has a twin which, on closer scrutiny, disappears leaving Hérodiade's star covered with blood; Hérodiade interprets his prediction as her vengeance on her rival. Phaniel also divulges Hérodiade's maternal status and, jogging her memory, Hérodiade emotionally recalls the child she abandoned and selfishly notes how the affection of a child could have comforted her frustrated ego and ambition. As she clamours for her daughter, Phaniel reveals her identity, pointing out Salomé in the street below. Recognising her "rival", Hérodiade

repudiates her daughter and hence her maternal status, encountering Phaniel's contempt.

### **Fifth tableau**

#### **Scenes 9-10 The Temple.**

Salomé fitfully recounts Jean's imprisonment and her suspicion of a conspiracy between Hérode and the Jewish High Priests. Her melancholy leads her to reminisce of happier days of tender devotion with Jean. Hérode appears, ironically soliloquising about his political impotence in the face of the Roman Empire. His thoughts turn to Jean whom he optimistically believes will join his cause, with the people behind him, to crush Roman oppression. Discovering Salomé, Hérode finally confesses his love to her and his desire to possess her. At Salomé's disdainful rejection of him, Hérode tries to use seigneurial authority to obtain Salomé for himself. Salomé, recognising Hérode for the first time as he who imprisoned her beloved Jean, is disgusted and resorts to declaring that she loves another who is greater than he. Hérode furiously swears to execute both Salomé and her lover.

#### **Scenes 11-12**

Various groups enter the Temple to a 'Holy march' which is followed by devotional chanting and bell ringing and a sacred dance. The court enters, headed by Hérode, Hérodiade, Vitellius and Phaniel. The High Priest calls upon Vitellius to condemn Jean, the agitator, a "false Messiah" who calls himself the "king of the Jews". Vitellius, however, passes responsibility of judging Jean to Hérode who, flattered, consents to question him. Jean appears humble and majestic and whilst his examination begins tranquilly, both Jean and Hérode are soon roused, Jean proclaiming his purpose to be "freedom". Construed as an insult to Rome, Jean's death is called for. Hérode, however, takes advantage of the hubbub to propose Jean an alliance that will save his life which Jean disdainfully rejects. Salomé pushes through the crowd, declaring her allegiance to Jean and her intention to die with him. Realising that Jean is the object of Salomé's love and his rival, Hérode emotionally sentences them both to death. In spite of herself, Hérodiade is troubled by the sentence. Jean self-martyringly braves his condemnation and curses Rome, predicting its downfall.

## **Act IV – Sixth tableau**

### **Scene 13**      A dungeon.

Whilst awaiting his execution, Jean reflects on the unfortunate outbursts that landed him in prison and says farewell to the “vain objects which have charmed him on earth”. He is obsessed with Salomé and as she arrives in his underground gaol, Jean is convinced that their tardy union is sanctioned by a benevolent God. His love-making is suave and sensual. Salomé, frightened at what she hears, is, nevertheless, carried away by Jean’s amorous enthusiasm. The people’s cry for Jean’s death interrupts his seduction and Jean irritably sends Salomé away. Refusing to leave him, Jean accepts her sacrifice, but as he is led to his execution, the High Priest separates them and tries to persuade Salomé to go to Hérode and comply with his wishes.

### **Seventh tableau**

#### **Scene 14**      Palace ballroom.

The Roman soldiers are amassed in a drunken orgy-like gathering and sing the praises of their fatherland. A ballet follows in which various ethnic groups of women dance ‘indigenous’ dances.

**Scene 15**      Salomé confronts the assembly and accuses its members of having withheld from her the honour of dying with her loved one. Hérode is bitter and Hérodiade troubled as Salomé pleads for Jean’s life. Turning to Hérodiade, Salomé appeals to the queen’s maternal side to grant Jean mercy. Reminding Hérodiade of her past and reawakening maternal pity within her soul, Salomé recounts her own unfortunate childhood but concludes by cursing her “inhuman” mother. Salomé’s accusation extinguishes Hérodiade’s pity and silences her. The executioner arrives with a bloodied sword to announce the death of Jean-Baptiste. Salomé lays the blame for his death on Hérodiade’s shoulders and rushes at her with a dagger. Only in fear of her own life does Hérodiade admit to being Salomé’s mother, at which point, Salomé turns the dagger on herself to the remorse of both Hérodiade and Hérode.

# Appendix 4 Hérode: "Vision fugitive"

Drawn from *Hérodiade. Opéra en quatre actes et sept tableaux*. Vocal Score. Paris: Heugel, 1909, 88-97.

- mi - se Es - pé - ran - ce trop brè - ve Qui viens bercer mon coeur et trou -

- bler ma raison... Ah! ne t'enfui pas, douce il-lu-si - on!...

Andante, 4/4 = *solo saxophone*

**Example A**

bassoons + horns

HERODE. *caver le plus grand charme et très hautement sans retenir.*

Vi - si-on fu - gi-tive et toujours poursui -

*a Tempo.*

strings

10

R. *fz*  
 - vi - e An - ge mys-té - ri - eux qui prend tou-te ma vi - e

H. *fz*  
 Ah!\_ c'est toil que je veux voir\_ O mon a - mour! ô mon espoir!

*più f.* saxophone *cresc.* *dim.*

15

H. *dolce.*  
 Vi - si - on\_ fu - gi - ti - - vel c'est toil

*dolce.* saxophone sax. + violins *molto animato.*

H. *fz*  
 Qui prends toute ma vi - e  
 Più mosso. *ritenz.* a Tempo appassionato.

*colla voce.*

Te presser dans mes bras!...

*dim.*

### Example B

Sen - tir bat - tre ton coeur D'une a-mou - reu - se ar - deur!...

*p*

Puis, mou - rir en-la-cés... dans u-ne même i-vres - se

Dans u-ne mê - me i-vres - se Pour ces transports ...

*En animant.*

*En animant.*

*crusc.*

pour cet - te flam - me Ah! sans re - mords et sans

*animando.* *sf*

plain - te Je donnerais mon â - me Pour toi mon amour

*Animato.* sax. + violins *animando.*

mon es - poir Vi - si - on fu - gi - ti - - vel c'est

*pp dolce.* saxophone sax. + violins *pp*

toil Qui prends toute ma vi -

*molto animato* *animato.* *animando* *rit.*

Example C

40

- el... Ouil c'est toi wind + horns mon amour

*a Tempo appassionato molto.*

*sf*

German VI Ic

45

Toi... mon seul amour mon es-poir...

*Allargando.*

*sf*

I

All<sup>o</sup> moderato.

UNE JEUNE BABYLONIENNE à Hérodote

Que ce philtre amou -

All<sup>o</sup> moderato. 100 = ♩

*mf* *pp simile.*

Harp + wind

50

- reux dis-si-pe ton en - nuil

HÉRODOTE (agité et inquiet)

*Un poco agitato.*

Si l'es-cla - ve men-tait cependant

*mf*



55

ce breu-va - ge... Si c'était un poi - son mor-tell...

60 Allegro.

Lâche terreur... voir son ima - ge... Puis-je hé-si-ter en - cor,

Aud.<sup>mo</sup> con moto.

(à la Babyloniennne)

(il boit)

— quand on m'offre le ciel? Donne la cou - - pe es-cla-vel

65

(jetant la coupe, et avec un cri).

Ah! dé-jà... je chan-

- cel - le... Mes yeux sont ob - scur - cisl...

**Example D**

pizz. strings.

Theme associated

70

Mais... je - la vois... c'est

*f* wind, harp.

with Salomé, the dancer

*And<sup>te</sup> molto appassionato.*

el - - - - - lel c'est el - lel Que de cris sur ma cor anglais

*And<sup>te</sup> molto appassionato,  $\text{rit} = \dots$*

clarinet

*pppp.*

G

lè - - - - - vre... et je ne puis par - ler... le sens là, dans mon

cor anglais oboe violins

clarinet

Gb

75

coeur qui s'a-gite et sou-pi - - re comme un a - veu brü-

lant qui ne peut s'exhaler Ah! prends pi-

Animez peu à peu.

80 Example E

-tié... pi-tié de mon mar - ty - re... Viens plus près! je le

veux Viens plus près!... Que ma lè - vre effleu - re

*avec passion*

L'or de tes cheveux... Qu'à tes pieds je meure

85

*più mosso* Ah! dans mon vertige, je ne veux que

toil... Viens plus près... je le veux...  
*ancora più mosso.* *allargando molto.*

1<sup>o</sup> Tempo più lento. (il s'assure vers le lit éroyant y entraîne SALOMÉ.)

Sois à moi... Sois à moi encor... Viens qu'à tes pieds je

*1<sup>o</sup> Tempo più lento*  
*pp* *cor ang.* *clarinet* *sax.* *saxophone* *rull.*

*rall* . . . **Plus lent.**  
*pp* (*presque sans voix*)  
*dim.* (PHANUEL paraît.)

meu - - - rel... En - cor... Plus

horns *colla voce.* sax. **Plus lent.** strings

**95** *più f* (avec un cri étouffé). **Andantino.** (il tombe accablé sur le lit et s'endorment.)

Près... encor... Ah! (sur un geste de PHANUEL, les Esclaves se lèvent et disparaissent)

*dim.* **Andantino.**

## Appendix 5 Comparison of ballet scenarios

### *Robert le Diable* Act III ballet

Pendant l'air précédent des feux follets ont parcouru ces longues galeries et s'arrêtent pour s'éteindre sur les tombeaux des nonnes. [...]

Des nonnes aux vêtements blancs apparaissent sur les degrés de l'escalier, montent et s'avancent en procession sur le devant du théâtre.

Hélène, la supérieure, les invite à profiter des instants et à se livrer au plaisir. [...] D'autres arrachent leurs longues robes et se parent la tête de couronnes de cyprès pour se livrer à la danse avec plus de légèreté. Bientôt elles n'écoutent plus que l'attrait du plaisir et la danse devient une bacchanale ardente. [...]

Au moment où Robert veut sortir il se trouve entouré de toutes les nonnes; une d'elles lui présente une coupe, mais il la refuse. Hélène, qui s'en aperçoit, s'approche de lui et par ses poses gracieuses cherche à le séduire. Robert la contemple avec admiration; bientôt il ne peut résister et accepte la coupe offerte par sa main. [...]

Hélène [...] le ramène en dansant autour de lui avec grâce. Robert subjugué par tant de charmes, oublie toutes ses craintes. [...] Robert, enivré d'amour, saisit le talisman; alors toutes les nonnes forment autour de lui une chaîne désordonnée. [...]

Bientôt la vie qui les animait s'éteint par degrés, et chacune d'elles vient retomber auprès de son tombeau.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drawn from Nathalie Combaz, *Commentaire littéraire et musicale; Avant-Scène Opéra, Meyerbeer, Robert le Diable*, 76, June 1985, 30-69, at 58.

### *Thaïs* Act III ballet

Autour du cénobite endormi l'ombre épaisse s'éclaire d'une lueur mystérieuse. A cette lueur appaisent les sept Esprits, de la tentation. [...] Ils se meuvent lentement comme des figures de Rêve... [...]

Athanaël se lève sous l'empire de son rêve. Les esprits le circonviennent [...] Ils éveillent autour de lui, toutes les âmes déchues. [...]

Démon à figure de femme, la Perdicion paraît, dans la splendeur de sa royauté. Un cortège solennel l'accompagne, dont la marche lente semble l'accomplissement de quelque rite religieux. [...]

Sa grâce les charme; ses promesses les séduisent. [...]

Tous ces trésors, la Perdicion les offre à Athanaël, les fait miroiter sous ses yeux, lui offre le tribut de toutes ces richesses. Enivré, charmé, Athanaël sourit à cet hommage. [...]

La Perdicion, déjà triomphante, tourbillonne autour de lui. Elle offre à ses lèvres la coupe des ivresses impures. La défaite du Saint va s'accomplir. [...]

SABBAT. [...] Une ronde infernale l'emporte dans le tourbillon des vices. [...] La Perdicion mène la ronde sabbatique. [...] En un mouvement plein de langueur, de perversité et de charme, les groupes entraînent Athanaël que conduit la Perdicion. La multitude semble se fondre et les jardins, les colonnades s'effacer. [...] Il n'y a plus que trois groupes, deux groupes, un seul groupe, puis... plus rien.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Drawn from Patrick Gillis, *Thaïs dans tous ses états: Genèse et remaniements; Avant-Scène Opéra, Massenet, Thaïs*, 109, May 1988, 66-75, at 73-4.