CONFRONTING EVIL

The Psychology of Secularization in Modern French Literature

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Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures

PSRL volume 66

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Purdue University Press
West Lafayette, Indiana

The paper used in this book meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America
Template for interior design by Anita Noble;
template for cover by Heidi Branham.
Cover photo:
The Gates of Hell
1880–1900
Auguste Rodin, France, 1840–1917
Bronze 1985.86
Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Gift of the B. Gerald Cantor Collection

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Powers, Scott M., author.
Title: Confronting Evil : the psychology of secularization in modern French literature / Scott M. Powers.
Description: West Lafayette, Indiana : Purdue University Press, [2016] | Series: Purdue studies in Romance literatures ; 66 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015035809| ISBN 9781557537416 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781612494524 (epdf) | ISBN 9781612494531 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: French literature--20th century--History and criticism. | French literature--21st century--History and criticism. | Evil in literature. | Ethics in literature. | Secularization--France.
Classification: LCC PQ307.E87 P69 2016 | DDC 840.9/353--dc23 LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015035809

For Alex

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Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this study without the generous support of mentors, colleagues, friends, and family at various stages of its development. As this project began several years ago as a doctoral dissertation, I thank Madeleine Dobie for her assiduous guidance, and for its critical readers, including Hilary Malawer, Felicia McCarren, Vaheed Ramazani, and Jean-Marie Gleize. I remain indebted to Miguel Benasayag who, in granting me multiple interviews, afforded me the unique opportunity to probe further the philosophy with which this work is very much in conversation. I am grateful both to the Malawer family for welcoming me into their home and to Tulane University for granting me a year-long fellowship at École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, where I was able to make great strides in both the research and the writing stages.

In a second, post-graduate stage, invaluable conversations with Vaheed Ramazani assisted me in reorienting my study of secularization by situating it within a psychological framework. An invitation to participate in the 2009 *Fleurs du Mal* seminar at the National Humanities Center, led by Jonathan Culler, gave me new insight into poetry on evil. The University of Mary Washington has been a pivotal player in providing numerous opportunities for me to advance in the project, including the Jepson Fellowship, a sabbatical, several research grants, and the book's subvention.

Some materials in this book first appeared in another form in other publications. I would like to thank the editors of the University of Nebraska Press for allowing me to use my article that first appeared in one of their journals. Chapter 1 is a modified and supplemented version of "Writing against Theodicy: Reflections on the Co-existence of God and Evil in Baudelaire's Poetry and Critical Essays," *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 39.1 & 2 (2010): 77–98. It is reproduced with permission from the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright *Nineteenth Century French Studies* 2010. I am also thankful to the editors of *Interdisciplinary.Net* and *Dalhousie French Studies* for allowing me to republish parts of my articles. Parts of Chapter 4 first appeared in a different form as "The Cross-Pressures of Secularization and the Lourdes Phenomenon in Zola and Huysmans," *Uneasy Humanity: Perpetual Wrestling with Evil*, ed. Colette Balmain and Nanette Norris (Oxford: Inter-disciplinary.Net Press, 2009), 79–86. Parts

of Chapter 5 were adapted from my article that first appeared as "Evil and Medicine: Interpreting Céline's Diagnostic Narratives," *Dalhousie French Studies* 67 (2004): 63–74.

Chapters of the book's final form have benefited from diligent readers who have generously given their time, including Joseph Acquisto, Brooke Di Lauro, Bill Hartland, Denis Provencher, and two anonymous reviewers for Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures. I especially thank Susan Y. Clawson and the editorial staff at PSRL for making this publication possible.

Finally, to those who have made this project worthwhile, I would like to give special thanks: my students at the University of Mary Washington, and in particular Cameron Doucette, Emily Enterline, and Lisa Grimes, who shared my passion for the writers and themes treated in this book; my family, for their loving support and encouragement at every step of the way; my mother, for instilling in me the passion for learning; and Alex, for his inspiring love and devotion and to whom this book is dedicated.

Introduction

A study of the many challenges posed by the modern literary text must include a serious consideration of the psychological dimensions of secularization. A broad understanding exists that the modernization of Western societies largely entails the retreat of religion from social institutions and from the individual's perception of the world. This idea has contributed to the development of secularization studies in recent years.[1] However, this emerging discipline has yet to elaborate a psychology that can substantially benefit the hermeneutics of modern literature. Through the critical analysis of works by nineteenth- and twentieth-century French writers, this book aims precisely to uncover a "psychology of secularization" at the core of modernity.

For the notion of the psychology of secularization to be meaningful, we must demarcate it as distinct in some fundamental way from the mindset of believers who interpret current events and personal life developments within the framework of God's plan. Correspondingly, as "secularization" connotes a process, its psychology should also be differentiated from that of the putative fixity of the "secular mind," which is generally discussed as a consciousness firmly grounded in a materialist way of perceiving the world, and characterized by what philosopher Charles Taylor describes as self-sufficient humanism (18).

Over the past century, much has been written on both the religious and secular minds. The pioneer work of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung, followed by the contributions of Rudolf Otto, Paul Tillich, and Peter Berger, forged a veritable psychology of religion that has become greatly enhanced in recent years by myriad studies often attempting to explain the nature of the religious mindset through the lens of the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and evolutionary biology.

Unlike the psychology of religion, that of the secular mind has not traditionally drawn attention to itself. This is due in part to the problematic conjecture among the scientific community that the thought processes of nonbelievers simply constituted "normal psychology." Nonetheless, scholars have studied influential theorists from the French *philosophes* to Karl Marx as examples of secular minds (or humanists) who subtract notions of the divine from human values or concerns.[2] In contrast, little effort has yet been made to elucidate a psychology of secularization, conceived not as a fixed understanding of the world but rather as an aggregate of psychological forces in flux between the epistemological certainties or reflexes of believers and those of nonbelievers. Neither religious nor secular, the psychology of secularization draws its substance from both.

Although there is reason to believe and I will argue that the religious and secular mindsets share a lot in common, I shall begin by accepting the general assumption of fundamental differences that make speaking of a "religious" or a "secular" way of thinking meaningful. Theorists commonly define the religious mindset as governed by belief in the supernatural, and in the sacredness of life because it is the visible manifestation of a spiritual realm that endows it with meaning. As Peter Berger has described it in *The Sacred Canopy*, "religion 'locates' human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference. […] God becomes the most reliable and ultimately significant other" (35, 38). The secular mind, on the other hand, as Robert Coles explains, "yield[s] to or seek[s] outright the profane: ideas and values and habits and interests [have] their origin in our earthly lives, our day-to-day desires, worries, frustrations, resentments" (11). Drawing from Max Weber, Charles Taylor describes the religious mind as the perception of an "enchanted" world governed by a host of spiritual forces continually coming into contact with it. A "porous," vulnerable self feels intimately connected to—even defined by—the cosmos. On the contrary, for the thoroughly secular consciousness, the world is "disenchanted" (Taylor 27),[3] the spirit realm recedes, and the ego becomes the primary locus of thoughts, feelings, and intent. The individual is largely self-reflexive, "buffered" from the environment, and confident in its "own powers of moral ordering." Accordingly, secularity is coterminous with the rise of exclusive

humanism in which all things are explained without reference to a deity (Taylor 18–19).[4]

I propose here a third type of psychology as a distinguishing attribute of the modern era, one that, in contrast to notions of the "religious" and "secular" mindsets, appears to be characteristically fluid. As the term *secularization* denotes a process rather than a relatively fixed state of being, at the level of the individual it imposes its own dynamics that can roughly be described as unstable because it is continually refashioned by the interpenetration of opposing religious and secular forces. Within this psychology, the self is caught in constant negotiation with rivaling frames of mind, and therefore incessantly labors to ground itself in one worldview. It reacts to its own abiding skepticism of one or both systems of thought by attempting to "take sides." However, because the ego remains forever interpellated by conflicting ideological forces, it fails to convince itself of the truth of one or the other.

The perspective on secularization underlying this study recognizes that religion has gradually lost much of its force in social interaction and individual consciousness in Western Europe. At the same time, it acknowledges that religion has never ceased to exert influence, and that in all likelihood it will continue to exist alongside, and transform in response to, secularity. In recent decades, a group of revisionist scholars including Jürgen Habermas, Peter Berger, David Martin, Charles Taylor, Grace Davie, and Danièle Hervieu-Léger have rethought secularization as an enduring, perhaps never fully completed, process. Whereas traditionally, secularization theorists construed history as the gradual and definitive abandonment of our metaphysical illusions, contemporary scholars have progressively contested this linear conception of secularization as a one-way street.[5] In considering the survival of religious thought and institutions in modern and post-modern societies, Berger observes in *The Desecularization of the World* that we do not in fact live in a "secularized" world (2). Correspondingly, Taylor attests that in "the secular age," secularity continues to be challenged by a lasting religious construal. In this vein, secularity is never fully achieved and self-sufficient, but constantly reshapes itself through a dialectical relationship with enduring religious thought. To clarify, I do not mean to dismiss the notion of the secular mind; for practical purposes we can consider many

influential philosophers and writers since at least the nineteenth century, as well as a non-negligible percentage of populations in Western societies today, as thoroughly secular. However, the writings of an increasing number of scholars begin to point in the direction of this study's hypothesis that the modern period's dominant psychology reveals a dynamics of fluctuation put into play by the divergent forces of secularization. Over the past two centuries, religion by no means disappears in Western Europe, but is nonetheless constantly challenged by, and in turn poses its own challenges to, secularity. A discussion of the psychology of secularization would therefore prove to be apposite for a study of the modern consciousness.

This book focuses primarily on French literature from the second half of the nineteenth century until World War II. Whereas the characteristics of the psychology of secularization outlined in the chapters that follow also apply to works from other time periods by writers of a variety of Western cultures, I believe that for historical reasons modern France presents us with some of the most vivid examples. To be sure, secularization has been taking place for several centuries. For thinkers such as Max Weber and Walter Benjamin, since as far back as medieval times capitalism has played a fundamental role in the demystification of our perception of the world.[6] And yet, as Owen Chadwick argues in *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, in Western Europe secularization as a fundamental transformation of the way in which a society at large apprehends the world developed only quite recently. Although the Enlightenment gave birth to many secularizing ideas, it wasn't until the following century that principles of intellectual inquiry and an altogether new understanding of the individual's place in the universe were either outwardly embraced or imperceptibly internalized by large swaths of populations.[7] During the nineteenth century, societies became willing to "jettison notions which hitherto were conceived as necessary to [their] very existence" (11).

In many respects, late modern France stands as a textbook example of the type of secularization that revisionists describe, in which society witnessed a significant waning of religious influence and sentiment even as religion itself endured in challenging the dominant trend of secularization. If we refer to the original meaning of secularization as "the expropriation of church property

by the state," we can unequivocally describe nineteenth-century France as a time of great secularization (Pecora 13). Under the Third Republic especially, the enactment of a series of laws aimed to eradicate the Church's role in the public sphere. The *laïcisation* of the public school system, abolition of the parochial character of cemeteries, suppression of the obligatory "repos dominical," legalization of divorce, and definitive separation of Church and State in 1905, effected a period of "dechristianization," which, as historians Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire aver, amounted to religion's marginalization in all aspects of French society and its relegation to private affairs (172).

Despite the aggressive trend of secularization in France's *fin de siècle*, the Church continued to exert her influence in profound ways. Late nineteenth-century French society exemplifies the great paradox of secularization as the "interplay of [both] secularizing and counter-secularizing forces."[8] Indeed, the nation's move toward a secular state met with a no-less-significant spiritual renewal that translated into a marked increase in baptisms, church attendance, and national pilgrimages, changed the face of the country's city centers with the construction of new churches and grandiose basilicas, and was reinforced by the conversion of famous writers and intellectuals to the Catholic faith. The erection of twenty-four new churches in Paris alone, the building of the Paris and Lyon basilicas, the flourishing of national shrines such as Lourdes that attracted ever greater numbers of French and European pilgrims, the proliferation of Catholic publications and workers' unions, and the birth of the reactionary political movement *Action française* that advocated the restoration of Roman Catholicism as the state religion overtly indicated what Cholvy and Hilaire have regarded as the spiritual rebirth of a nation (120). In this book, I examine writers of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France as various case studies of a modern psychology, born in the interstices of the rivaling cultural trends of religion and secularism.

The Religious Other of the Modern Text

One of my aims is to explore reasons why, from a psychological perspective, religiosity persists in modern literary texts otherwise praised for their high secularity. An investigation into the enduring place of religious sentiment in the later writings of Charles

Baudelaire—hailed by scholars beginning with Walter Benjamin as *the* modern poet of the nineteenth century—will prove particularly enlightening.[9] Baudelaire's prose poems present striking illustrations of the process of secularization. In forsaking the Catholic mysticism of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *Le Spleen de Paris* unfurls a highly secularized vision of the individual grounded in material reality. And yet, despite an overarching linear movement in Baudelaire's poetry from mystical correspondences to a poetics of daily experience, there emerge in numerous prose poems many circular movements, even recoils, indicative of on-going investment in notions of the divine.

If secularization entails the historical retreat of God from human affairs, the ego would seem naturally to experience secularization as loss. Consequently, the dramatization of secularization in literature would involve acts of mourning. Not unlike our grieving for a recently deceased loved one, the passing of the deity, as implied by Nietzsche's "death of God" and characterized by the transition from belief to unbelief, would logically involve a grieving period. Following Freud's theory on mourning, I will argue that grieving subsumes a psychology in which the ego enters into an ambivalent and enduring relationship with the "deceased" divine. From this perspective, I can regard both secularization and the modernity of writing as the performance of mourning. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, secularization indeed manifests itself as loss, as the title of the prose poem "Perte d'auréole" intimates, and is dramatized as grieving throughout the collection. The Baudelairean experience of secularity involves the loss of faith in the hidden correspondences of transcendence between the visible and the invisible that had once endowed the cosmos with meaning and beauty. In fact, the experience of loss proves so overwhelming that it begins to materialize as the site of trauma. The secularizing project in *Le Spleen de Paris* to deconstruct mystical lyricism manifests as the impossibility of full relinquishment of the divine ideal; the self never entirely detaches itself from the lost object that is the enchanted world. Such is the lesson of "Laquelle est la vraie?," in which the poet cannot take leave of the grave of his beloved "Bénédicta"—the personification of a poetry founded on spiritual correspondences—and of "Les Vocations," in which the narrator's childhood self keeps his eyes fixed on the site of God's disappearance behind the clouds.

Many of secularization's paradoxes are inextricably intertwined with the seemingly contradictory act of mourning. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud described mourning as "oppositional" because the ego is torn between yearning for the idealized lost object of cathexis and recognizing the reality of its definitive absence (244). In other words, the self remains psychically invested in that which it has lost, even as it seeks healing. Paradoxical though it seems, Freud asserted that this continued attachment to the cherished object is what in fact affords true healing. By figuring secularization in terms of the psychoanalytic portrayal of mourning, we can begin to appreciate the various movements toward and away from religion in *Le Spleen de Paris* as rooted in the psychological complexities of secularization.

Much like in Baudelaire's poetics of grieving, in Zola's fiction the crucial function of sublimation helps account for the psyche's enduring attraction to the religious. Following the linear theory of secularization, naturalism purports to unveil the reality of the human condition by simultaneously divesting us of our metaphysical illusions and shining the light of truth on our brute state of being. This holds the potential of translating into a nihilistic literary vision of an unredeemingly materialist, disenchanted world that reduces the individual to biological drives. But Zola's readers especially are well aware that religious notions are not simply "subtracted." The experimental method, meant to be strictly physiological in scope, ironically retains the theological notions of evil and divine retribution. In fact, Zola's narratives recuperate qualities of the enchanted world in which, through a curious mystification of the body, moral evil is punished and good prevails. The resurgence of God-like figures in *Thérèse Raquin* and the *Rougon-Macquart* volumes often appears to be largely prereflective, and can be explained psychologically as a subconscious wish fulfillment for a hidden universal order. From this perspective, Jacques Lacan's revision of Nietzsche's famous proclamation, which asserts that God is not dead but rather "unconscious," will prove pertinent.

In Zola's fiction, recurring religious motifs and the notion of the unconscious God can be especially understood in the context of sublimation. In *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes sublimation, in fact, as a survival mechanism in which the ego keeps the abject—that which threatens the self's integrity and

sense of an ordered universe—under control. Sublimation is especially important for an unbelieving writer such as Zola, whose potential to feel threatened by a godless world of chaos—indeed the very one that he seeks to transcribe—is so formidable. However, it is religion, as Kristeva argues, that constitutes the ultimate sublimation, for it aims primarily to purify the self by separating sin, taboo, and transgression from God and the sense of sanctification. Her understanding of the sublime draws from both Kant's and Freud's treatment of the notion. According to Kant, we experience the sublime in our apprehension of nature. The self's inability to immediately intuit the infinity of an overwhelming natural object creates a negative pleasure in which the self is both drawn to and repelled by it. Above all, the self perceives the daunting object as an abyss that threatens its integrity. But this failure of the imagination is subsequently countervailed by the pleasure derived from reason's concomitant assertion of the concept of infinity. As a result of the mind's successful resistance to an annihilating presence, the shaping of moral integrity (and in essence the self's reaffirmation) constitutes the sublime experience. In other words, reason converts a negative affect into a positive one as it derives pleasure through its assertion of infinity and a deeper appreciation of one's being. For Kant then, as Vaheed Ramazani has aptly summarized, the sublime constitutes a mixture of two contradictory feelings—"an initial affect of pain, anxiety, melancholy or terror" that gives rise to "compensatory energies such as exultation or rapture" (94). In fact, what may seem to be the sublime's untimely emergence in philosophy during a period of great secularization of thought served the purpose of rescuing the skeptical ego from the negative affects triggered by the apprehension of what many had begun to perceive as a godless universe. As Taylor explains, whereas the reasoning individual was becoming increasingly self-absorbed, Kant's formulation of the sublime responded to our need to aspire beyond ourselves, to put us in touch with something grander (335–44).

Freud gives psychoanalytical depth to the sublime experience in forging a theory of sublimation as the most productive of defense mechanisms that redirects libidinal drives toward socially beneficial achievements. As the direct satisfaction of the libido can be deleterious to society, Freud describes sublimation as assuring civilization by protecting the self against nature, namely, the self's

own unruly instincts. As Clayton Crockett explains, "the Kantian sublime passes into the Freudian unconscious, and reappears, most explicitly and powerfully, in the sense of the uncanny that disturbs conscious thinking from inside" (35). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the act of sublimation serves to protect the subject from anxiety. For the unbeliever, this negative affect accompanies the apprehension of a godless world of chaos, violence, and destruction, and is often phenomenally conveyed through one's own bodily drives. Put briefly, in their discussion of sublimity both Freud and Kant uncover a psychic transmutation of those disturbing, threatening affects that the ego perceives as originating either from outside or within the self into positive pleasure. Along these lines, Neil Hertz has precisely described a recurrent phenomenon in literature as "the sublime turn," that is to say "a movement of disintegration and figurative reconstitution" (14). What is precisely at stake in much of modern literature is nothing less than what Ramazani describes as the formation of "a transcendent subject from and against psychic defeat" (94).

Sublimation in fictional writing accounts for seeming inconsistencies in—and in fact succors the process of—secularization. Throughout Zola's opus, sublimation has the effect of imparting a numinous dimension to a secularizing perception of our human condition, thereby serving as a compensatory mechanism to offset the negative affects of anxiety and terror that accompany the confrontation with a godless universe. We will look at how literary mechanisms of sublimation in Zola's narratives respond to the disarming affects of destructive bodily drives and to the overwhelming void at the heart of the nonbeliever's universe by transmuting them into forms of transcendence that borrow from religious traditions. This would corroborate Ramazani's description of the sublime as positing "an essence lying *beyond* the phenomenal world," filling in gaps with "metaphysical presence" (124).

The modern writer's ambivalent relationship with the religious can also be explained through historical contextualization. France's *fin de siècle* was a time when the opposing belief systems associated with Catholicism and naturalism presented formidable challenges to each other. The uniqueness of this time period as traversed by equally dominant worldviews made it difficult to write from within a system of thought without simultaneously feeling threatened by, and perhaps even strangely attracted to, the other

ideology. Taylor's evaluation of prominent moments in the history of Western thought as profoundly marked by the "fragilization" of belief systems helps us to understand the complexity of late nineteenth-century French literary texts. In societies transformed by the mutual fragilization of opposing belief systems, citizens feel more "cross-pressured" than assured. Taylor evokes as an illustration William James's notion of the "open space," in which the ego feels itself being pulled in opposite directions by rival frames of mind. Accordingly, as Taylor explains, "religion remains ineradicably on the horizon of areligion; and vice versa" (592). The competing ideologies that constitute—and the powerful cross-pressures that traverse—the secular age, make it nearly impossible to hold an unwavering conviction in a single ideology. Faith is inevitably accompanied by doubt.

A careful examination of *Lourdes* will, I believe, reveal Zola's treatment of religion not solely as superstition or the object of ridicule, but also as a threatening force because of its genuine appeal. Once the novel is placed in its historical context of the violent clashes between Church and State, the "religious other" can begin to be understood as possessing a considerable allure and, consequently, as posing an existential threat for secularity. In this case, what Zola encounters as particularly troubling and that consequently draws his undivided attention is the Lourdes phenomenon. The shrine's attraction of ever greater numbers of pilgrims defied the writer's concept of history as the gradual abandonment of religious sentiment. Furthermore, its claims of faith healings challenged unbelief in God as well as the abilities of medical science to cure. At times, precisely because of the strong appeal of "the other side," the naturalist narrative acquired attributes habitually associated with mystical writings.

By considering the possibility that writers pulled by cross-pressures feel drawn to the opposing camp, it is possible to anticipate that they demonstrate a tendency to deviate from their own interpretation of the world. Whether deliberately or subconsciously, they may entertain the possibility of "the other." Even if only momentarily, the ideologue's text can exhibit fissures that allow it to stretch beyond the parameters of its system of thought. In the case of secular narratives, this involves envisioning the possibility of the supernatural that translates into a highly uncharacteristic "dabbling" in the mystical. More specifically, I will look at

how narrative forms of Zola's *Lourdes* break with traditional narrative modes to imagine the existence of forces ignored by science. To take one example, the abundant use of what Dorrit Cohn has labeled consonant psychonarration, in which the narrator uncharacteristically assumes the perspective of the faithful, serves as a vehicle for experimentation with religious belief. An unequivocally mystical rendition of the shrine itself presents another curious aspect of the novel worthy of investigation. If we consider *Lourdes* alongside the author's remarks describing his own visit to Lourdes, which he expressed in terms of marvel and rapture, and which betray a keen if unconscious attraction to the religious other, then we can begin to account for many of the seeming inconsistencies embedded in the novel that Zola considered his most complex.

Secularization as Ironic

The richness of modern texts lies in their multidimensionality. The depth of a Baudelairean or a Zolian narrative involves countermovements of recoil alongside an overarching linearity, in which a secularizing project continually reinvests in notions of the sacred. Once I have begun to account for the resurgence of the religious in modern literature, I will then attempt to identify yet another textual movement, a psychic backlash that seeks ways to contain the religious. In light of the secularizing scope of *Le Spleen de Paris* and *Les Rougon-Macquart*, a survival of the religious would threaten their very foundation, were it not immediately "quarantined." For Baudelaire, irony serves this very purpose. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, the religious proves vulnerable to ironic negation. Scholars such as Leo Bersani have observed the importance of irony in the collection as a "process of alienating self-identification" (123). Drawing from this understanding of Baudelairean irony, we will consider the self-mockery in the prose poems as a counter force to the otherwise overwhelming task of grieving. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, irony works to alleviate the anxiety of loss that accompanies the ongoing process of mourning God.

We can better understand the relationship between mourning and the irony of self-mockery if we bear in mind the narcissistic nature of the ego's relationship to its various loved objects. For Freud, our libidinal investments are essentially narcissistic. The self-love that characterizes the earliest stages of the infant's psychic

development eventually transforms into object-love. In redirecting its libido outward, the ego proceeds to construct a self-image conditioned by an outside world of others. In this transformation, narcissism continues to dominate the self's relationship to objects. For Baudelaire, the loss of God, of a romantic Ideal, of the metaphysical premises of lyric poetry, is ultimately experienced as a loss of a part of the self, of the romantic/lyric/mystic self-object. Consequently, irony manifests as a vital psychic reaction, a mode of distancing the self from the pain associated with the feeling of self-incoherence. Irony constitutes a coping mechanism that assuages the aching loss of, and especially the self's enduring and painful identification with, an object of cathexis. To demonstrate this involves unpacking and delineating the roles of the concurrent modes of elegy and irony in key prose poems whose primary theme is loss. Through the mode of irony the ego distances itself from "former" selves in order to achieve a sense of psychic coherence that begins to overcome its existential self-contradictions.

In Zola's case, religion's resurgence within a sustained project of secularization in the form of sublimation and the mystical other's abiding allure is similarly contained through various narrative strategies that amount to instances of self-irony. Not unlike the suppression of elegy in Baudelairean irony, the Zolian text executes a number of strategies aimed to distance itself from its own tendencies toward the mystical. The lengthy middle section of Zola's *Lourdes*, steeped in passages of consonant psychonarration in which the narrative voice appropriates the believer's perspective, is eventually curtailed by the dominance of dissonant psychonarration in the final sections. The narrator moves to estrange himself from the pilgrims' religious sentiment by employing textual mechanisms designed to effect maximal psychic dissonance. The ironic distance established in the conclusion of *Lourdes* between the narrator and the believers composes one segment of a positivist, textual framing that aims to parry the allure of the supernatural, to quarantine an otherwise highly ambivalent "experimental" work that is drifting toward the mystical.

Another way to distinguish between the positivist framing and the allure of the mystical at the core of Zola's narrative is to speak of this core as the unconscious other of the naturalist text. Narrative elements including the *mise-en-abyme* encourage such an understanding of the novel by triggering a psychic narrative

split between two diametrically opposed versions of the Lourdes phenomenon. We will consider how the text draws attention to its own "narrative split" in which a diegetic observer often "forgets himself" as he "gets lost" or "caught up" in the magical, enchanting world of "divine" phenomena. Correspondingly, as other scholars have remarked, in writing a story on the spiritual world of Lourdes, Zola too often "forgot" himself. But any damage inflicted on the novel's naturalist message is limited, if not nullified, by the return in the conclusion to a formulaic rearticulation of unbelief. That which we can recognize as a genuine abiding allure of the religious other, evidenced both within the narrative and in the author's own admissions of the supernatural's appeal in contemporaneous correspondence, journal entries, and interviews, is recast through an overdetermined framing as simple "staging." The reader is thereby led to misinterpret a crisis in naturalism as an example of the red herring. Above all, the complexity of a text such as *Lourdes*, in bearing the marks both of skepticism and of enthralled fascination with the numinous, is indicative of a secularization project in French literature propelled as much by a continual investigation into the role of religious sentiment in human society and psychology as it is by strong animosity toward faith in God.

Secularization and Its Conversions

Occasionally, a highly secularized system of thought exhibits something more dramatic than a pattern of self-containing recoils. Whereas the religious in the late Baudelaire and in Zola manifests as di-versions, it constitutes the expression of actual con-versions in an author such as Huysmans. A consideration of the writer's conversion to Catholicism as a counter-example will serve to highlight the precarious nature of secularization. In many ways, Huysmans's naturalist texts can be considered more resolutely secular than Zola's. In painting a materialist human condition reduced to unforgiving meaninglessness, his version of naturalism categorically refuses any temptation to cancel the disarming a/effects of this vision with compensatory brush strokes of the numinous. Nevertheless, upon careful examination of Huysmans's early works, we can detect the presence of the numinous, though in highly oblique and latent form. In texts such as *Marthe* and *Les*

Sœurs Vatard, it can be said that the religious is not "subtracted" but "repressed." The naturalist's conversion to Catholicism and his ensuing spiritually oriented novels should be understood as a dramatic surfacing of the repressed religious. This would corroborate William James's formulation, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* of conversion not as a "rupture" in which the self categorically abandons its former avatar, but rather as a reconciliation of contradictory and often subconscious forces. Such a consideration of Huysmans alongside Zola begins to highlight one of secularization's most troubling paradoxes. It just might be that the more radical a system of thought in terms of its secularity, the more vulnerable it is to transform into its religious other. While I make these important distinctions between the two writers' literary trajectories, my juxtaposition of spiritual conversion as dramatized in Huysmans's novels with the role of sublimation in Zola also invites a curious rapprochement in which Zola's countless sublimations begin to appear as miniature forms of conversion. By discussing Zolian sublimation as a type of "conversion" of negative affect into images of transcendence, and Huysmans's conversion as the ultimate "sublimation" of Being, in effect we begin to regard religious and secularizing texts as evincing homologous human experiences that perform analogous functions.

By conceiving of conversion as the liminality of secular thought, we may be able to tackle even the most enigmatic writers of the modern period. Céline studies have run into an impasse in the ongoing attempt to reconcile two seemingly contradictory images of the highly modern yet blatantly anti-Semitic writer. On the one hand, Céline should figure prominently in any study of literary secularity. *Voyage au bout de la nuit* presents an unsettling portrait of the human condition, inspired by contemporary medical theory, as decisively material. The self wanders alone in its "night travels," a metaphor for life itself bereft of all forms of transcendence. However, Céline's sudden turn from a bold secularity to embrace an unabashed and prosaic anti-Semitism steeped in Christian symbolism and myth suggests a complex struggle between religious and secular modes of thought. But to what extent can we account for this radical shift in Céline's thought by regarding it as a type of conversion? Does the drastic transformation in vision in Céline's opus originate from a genuine embrace of a new,

"spiritualized" worldview? And if so, what may this say about the relationship between (para-)religious and secular thought in the early twentieth century?

Kristeva's formulation of anti-Semitism as the sublimation of the abject self helps us to speak of conversion in Céline. By "providing itself with objects," the self acquires a compass for what the ego had hitherto experienced as a nauseating journey through life (136). In anti-Semitism, the Jew becomes the negative pole that recasts in meaningful terms one's perception of a world otherwise perceived as absurd and experienced as identity-threatening; the transcendental ego is reborn alongside the apparition of the diabolic Semite. And yet, I insist that for Céline, before the Jew there was the ballerina. The few appearances of the female dancer in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* constitute embryonic forms of sublimation that Céline would only tap into after the publication of his second novel, *Mort à credit*. The beginning of *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, Céline's first anti-Semitic pamphlet, reenacts a seemingly spiritual conversion in which the first-person narrator forsakes his visions of darkness. He abandons himself at the feet of the ballerina, whose rhythmic luminosity is equated with God himself. It would seem that before the Jew, Céline moved to sublimate death by transforming it into his own frenetic dance in homage to the *danseuse*. Drawing from scholars' consideration of dance for Céline as a way out of nihilism, my analysis of the pamphlet's prologue presents the turn to anti-Semitism as the direct result of a *failed* conversion, due to impresarios' repeated refusals to stage the writer's ballets. Keeping in mind the self's narcissistic relationship with its love objects suggests why Céline's self-image as a writer of dance foreclosed upon through formal rejections was sufficient to occasion his (perhaps premature) existential death as a writer of ballets. It is not a coincidence that the novelist's self-transformation into an anti-Semitic pamphleteer follows on the heels of his failure to become a writer of dance, for it constitutes an alternative (if lamentable) path to sublimation, and especially self-sublimation. All in all, a study of conversion in Céline paints a picture of the potentially dangerous vulnerabilities of a secularizing literary vision that does not maintain a dynamic relationship with the religious.

The Secularization of Evil

Inevitably, a study of secularization must include a discussion of evil. For secular thinkers, the sheer existence of human suffering is what most often forms the foundation for unbelief in God. Traditionally a religious term, evil has not only survived in modern texts, it serves as the very starting point for their secularity. In many ways, Baudelaire quite provocatively presented evil as the central theme of *Le Spleen de Paris*. In the prefatory letter, the poet chose the religiously freighted symbol of the serpent as a metaphor for the collection's structure. In his personal notes he considered the satanic number *666* as both the total number of poems that he envisioned authoring, and as an alternative title to the collection. In contrast to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in the prose poems evil is anchored in the realities of the urban setting. No longer solely a metaphysical notion, evil now constitutes the source for sociological, anthropological, and psychological inquiries into so much that can be encountered in the modern city. If "Le Gâteau" features the flighty meditations of a narrator who momentarily loses sight of the reality of evil ("mon total oubli de tout *le mal* terrestre"), it is only to stage an all-the-more violent confrontation with the undeniable ubiquity of suffering and inequality when he bears witness to a "guerre fratricide" between two starving children who fight each other to the death over a piece of bread (297; emphasis added).

In providing the theoretical framework of the naturalist text, the experimental method essentially proposes a new way of studying evil. Presented as a scientific experiment, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* offers a putatively unbiased observation of human behavior that attempts to explain in purely physiological terms the eponymous character's proclivity to murder—her "mal incurable" (205). For Céline, evil is the only natural human response to the meaninglessness of existence. Bardamu, the diegetic narrator of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, observes that every segment of society is responsible for evil. The only difference is that whereas the poor incessantly commit acts of evil, the rich pay others to do evil on their behalf: "Ils ne font pas *le mal* eux-mêmes, les riches. Ils payent" (332; emphasis added). Céline's sympathetic vision diagnoses murder, suicide, and abuse as ways of coping with the unbearableness of existence, which infects all social echelons.

The age-old theodicy debate lies at the heart of modern literary inquiries. Whereas theodicy refers to a long tradition in which theologians, over the centuries, have proposed a variety of arguments to justify God's existence in light of a world of evil and suffering, Baudelaire positions himself in opposition to theodicy seemingly both to work through—and to justify—his unbelief. Passages from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, his art criticism, book reviews, and essays on child psychology and psychedelic drugs evidence a sustained reflection on the coexistence of God and evil. A highly reflective, overarching system of writing "against theodicy" becomes increasingly manifest in Baudelaire's later essays and prose poems, which repeatedly place in doubt God's existence in the face of the reality of evil. Against this intellectual reflection that amounts to a secularization of thought—the loss of God, the demystification of Being—we witness in a visceral mode the birth of the elegiac ego looking over its shoulder at the vanishing divinity.

Rather than constituting a philosophical inquiry, Zola's naturalism enlists the established position against theodicy to parry the cross-pressures of Catholicism. When all other reasoning fails in the effort to reject the notion of miracles, the *Lourdes* narrative is obliged to divert attention to the myriad ailing pilgrims who do not receive divine healing. Whereas Zola (and the scientific community as a whole) was forced to acknowledge that some healings did in fact occur at the shrine, in *Lourdes* the narrator dismisses their divine origin by making the observation that the overwhelming majority of pilgrims leave as sick as when they arrived. In the novel's concluding sections, the narrative foregrounds the chronic suffering of innocent children as proof of God's nonexistence. However, the observations made on the existence of human suffering do not necessarily constitute a source of inquiry. Instead, the author enlists a polarizing position in the theodicy debate to justify his *a priori* belief system, and especially to reanchor the novel firmly in naturalism's ideological foundations from which it began to stray.

For the early Céline, recognition of God's nonexistence is more an unconscious reflex than the conclusion drawn from a philosophical inquiry (Baudelaire) or the pillar of a combative ideology (Zola). Nonetheless, in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* God's nonexistence is incessantly reaffirmed through the chronicling of human sufferings. Bardamu loses even the slightest glimmer of hope in

some form of redemption, whether on earth or beyond, precisely when forced to confront the physical sufferings of a young child inflicted with typhoid fever. At the child's death, when any impression of life's meaningful purpose dissolves, Bardamu is left to face the emptiness of existence. The constant reaffirmation of human suffering, accentuated by the absence of any legitimate form of compensation or transcendence, in essence equates evil with Being. It comes as no surprise that in his anti-Semitic pamphlets, Céline embraces a diametrically opposed vision of evil that carves out a space for the diabolic Jew and the sublime figures of the *danseuse* and the Aryan.

At the heart of evil's secularization lies a psychological struggle. Consideration of the absurdity of human suffering as an underlying tenet of secularity leads to a more thorough analysis of the defining attributes of writers' literary styles as ways of coping with evil. As discussed throughout this book, Baudelairean (self-)irony and Zolian sublimation are two mechanisms of compensation in the painful confrontation with a godless universe. A study of James allows a discussion of conversion in Huysmans and Céline in similar terms. For James, conversion is ultimately a(nother) way of coping with evil. He proffers the psychological type of the "healthy mind" as characterized by the tendency to minimize evil. Its "healthiness" is paradoxically "afflicted" by a congenital anesthesia to evil that works as a psychic self-protection through ignoring it. Along these lines, irony and sublimation constitute two prophylactics against the anxieties of secularity. Quite contrarily, James's psychological type of the "sick soul" exposes its own vulnerabilities in taking full cognizance of evil's reality. And yet, at a psychic threshold in which the "sick soul" can no longer tolerate a sustained apprehension of evil, it demonstrates great propensity for "second birth" in which the ego embraces a new vision of things in order to continue functioning. What Huysmans's and Céline's conversions demonstrate, for our purposes, is the precarious nature of what could be called "extreme" secularity, curiously poised to transform into its religious other. If unmitigated by coping mechanisms such as irony and sublimation, secular confrontation with evil may lead, paradoxically, to "spiritual" conversion. By and large, this study approaches writers' confrontation with evil as an effective barometer for measuring the extent—and bringing to light the paradoxes—of secularization.

The Organization of the Book

I have divided my discussion of secularization into five chapters. Chapter 1 establishes Baudelaire's secularization project by uncovering a philosophical system—a writing against theodicy—in texts as diverse as the lyrical poems of the "Tableaux parisiens," *La Morale du joujou*, the *Salon de 1859*, *Les Paradis artificiels*, the review of Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and relevant prose poems. A gradual erasure of God in the face of real evil provides the conceptual framework for the major shift in Baudelaire's poetry from an idealist, metaphysical poetics in *Les Fleurs du Mal* toward a realist poetry of "daily experience" in *Le Spleen de Paris*.[10]

Chapter 2 adds psychological depth to Baudelaire's highly reflective, philosophical system. The poet's engagement in questions of theodicy serves as the conscious backdrop against which, by drawing from Freud's theory of mourning, I will underscore a survival of psychic investment in the mystical that expresses itself as a yearning for that which has been lost. Accordingly, the prose poems bear witness to the Derridean concept of *hauntology* in which the ghosts of Baudelaire's past—lyricism and its metaphysical foundations in the Ideal and in God—are neither entirely absent nor present, but continue to "haunt" the creative process. In this way, faith and the mystical may begin to be understood as the specters of secularization. Critical theory will also help to unravel the ambiguous relationship that the ego experiences with the "deceased" by regarding irony as a coping mechanism to repel the abiding allure of the lost love object.

Chapter 3 elucidates the complex role of religious thought in naturalist literature. A fresh look at *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola's assiduous attempt to reconceptualize evil solely along secular lines, will reveal God to be its "unconscious" text. The apparition of God-like figures provides an effective illustration of Lacan's reformulation of Nietzsche's dictum that God is not dead but unconscious. In the chapter's middle sections, I turn to sublimation as an essential component of secularization that sustains the ego in its confrontation with a godless universe, but that is also responsible for the survival of religious themes in *Les Rougon-Macquart* and *Les Quatre Evangiles*. Finally, a consideration of conversion in Huysmans's works as "deferred sublimation" will effect a rapprochement between his religiosity and Zola's secularity.

In Chapter 4, Taylor's theory of the mutual "fragilization" of opposing systems of thought will provide a historical approach to Kant's and Freud's discussions of the sublime experience. A close examination of Zola's *Lourdes* alongside Huysmans's *Les Foules de Lourdes* will underscore both works as born of the cross-pressures exerted by the opposing ideology. Highly reactionary, Zola's and Huysmans's writings are propelled by self-doubt and the attendant need to ward off the enemy's appeal. Correspondingly, their appropriation of the polarizing and entrenching debate on theodicy to parry the disarming effects of doubt will lead us to the conclusion that the two narratives are precariously written "on faith."

Chapter 5 considers the role of sublimation to account for a series of shifts in Céline's thought—from a secular to a quasi-religious vision of evil, from a modern medical perspective inspired by Pasteur's discovery of the pathological microbe to an earlier medical tradition that imagined relationships between physical traits and morality, and from his identification as medical practitioner to his self-image as writer. An analysis of *Bagatelles pour un massacre*'s opening passages, in which Céline transcribes his attempt at conversion to dance as a way out for his disconsolate worldview, provides the clues to understanding the embrace of anti-Semitism as a tragic consequence of deferred sublimation. Drawing both from James's psychological description of the divided soul and Kristeva's associations between the religious mind and anti-Semitism, I will argue that Céline's conversion to anti-Semitism warns readers of the dangerous potentials of a radical secularity that refuses psychic compensation for divine absence.

Chapter One

Writing against Theodicy

Secularization in Baudelaire's Poetry and Critical Essays

Scholars have not sufficiently identified the sustained reflections in Baudelaire's writings on the coexistence of God and evil. The lack of attention to the poet's engagement in the centuries-old dialogue on theodicy can be explained in part by the increasing unpopularity in Baudelairean criticism to discuss theological concepts as an inspiration for the poet's writings.[1] As part of an ongoing investigation into issues of rhetoric and (post-)structuralism, scholarship has focused its attention on dimensions of Baudelaire's modernity, even post-modernity, including his poetics of irony and deconstruction. Another reason for scholars' virtual silence with respect to Baudelaire's reflections on the coexistence of God and evil is that these reflections emerge rather obliquely, and most often in lesser known essays. However, I argue below that Baudelaire's continuous and evolving thought on God and evil, most detectable in his critical texts, helps to provide a conceptual framework for the shift from an idealist, metaphysical poetics in *Les Fleurs du Mal* toward a more "realist" poetry of "daily experience" in *Le Spleen de Paris*.[2] My analysis seeks above all to delineate a project of secularization at the foundation of Baudelaire's poetic vision.

Theodicy is a term that refers to a tradition in which theologians, over the centuries, have proposed a variety of arguments to justify the existence of a benevolent, omnipotent God in light of a world of evil and suffering. By suggesting that Baudelaire writes "against" theodicy, I mean that the poet calls into question God's existence precisely because of the reality of evil. To argue that Baudelaire wrote "against theodicy" might appear implausible if one thinks solely of poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* structured on binary opposites of good and evil, God and Satan, and "Spleen et Idéal," and that seem to correspond to the poet's oft-cited remark in his *Journaux intimes* that "Il y a dans tout homme, à toute

heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan" (*OC* 1: 682). And yet, there is also in *Les Fleurs du Mal* a move away from God, who fades in the presence of destructive impulses and evil figures. In "Au lecteur," "Correspondances," and "L'Héautontimorouménos" (to name but a few), evil emerges as a more compelling concept and as the triumphant force. Whereas a few poems in *Les Fleurs* suggest the poet's fascination with the divine, what is most immediate—most real—is evil. "Au lecteur," depicts evil as the individual's irresistible response to the chronic existential crisis of *ennui*. As a positive force (positive in the sense that it is something that veritably exists), evil awakens the poet's dulled sensibilities. As Benjamin Fondane eloquently described it, the poet is responding to the need to feel himself exist, to break with the monotony of the quotidian, and it is through pain that he most acutely feels alive.[3] The collection's sadomasochism can best be understood in light of Baudelaire's candid statements in the *Journaux intimes* on the pleasure that he feels in committing acts of evil: "Moi, je dis: la volupté unique et suprême de l'amour gît dans la certitude de faire le *mal*. —Et l'homme et la femme savent de naissance que dans le mal se trouve toute volupté. […] Cruauté et volupté, sensations identiques, comme l'extrême chaud et l'extrême froid" (*OC* 1: 652, 683). An originality of Baudelaire's thought is his rapprochement of evil with life itself, or in philosophical terms, evil's conflation with Being. An extension of this thesis is Baudelaire's equation of evil with the beautiful, as the title "Flowers of Evil" intimates.

Often times, *Les Fleurs du Mal* portrays even God as an evil force. In "Bénédiction," the poet's mother, a troubling avatar of the Virgin Mary, considers her pregnancy as a curse from God, whom she blames for her suffering. Her apostrophe to the deity constitutes an indictment of his wickedness: "Je ferai rejaillir ta haine qui m'accable / Sur l'instrument maudit de tes méchancetés" (*OC* 1: 7). Similarly, in "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" God is cast as a bloodthirsty tyrant ("un tyran gorgé de viande") and Saint Peter is praised for having forsaken a whip-thrashing Jesus ("Tu fouettais tous ces vils marchands à tour de bras / […] Le remords n'a-t-il pas / Pénétré dans ton flanc plus avant que la lance? […] Saint Pierre a renié Jésus… il a bien fait"; *OC* 1: 121–22).

It would prove fruitless, however, to seek in *Les Fleurs du Mal* a single, consistent vision of good and evil. Rather, its lyricism is

inspired by a variety of religious, esthetic, and political models, including the Church's belief in the spiritual benefits of human suffering (e.g., "Bénédiction," "Réversibilité"), the romantic and *démocrates-socialistes* notion of the messianic devil ("Les Litanies de Satan"), and Proudhon's proclamation that God is evil (e.g., "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" and "Abel et Caïn"). And then there are poems such as "Harmonie du soir," "À une Madone," "Les Phares," and "La Destruction" in which the lyric voice's attraction to and fascination with religious figures and symbols betray the poet's more visceral religiosity that derives from his Catholic upbringing. In the *Journaux intimes*, Baudelaire candidly admits his penchant for spiritual matters: "Dès mon enfance, tendance à la mysticité" (*OC* 1: 706). In light of the disparate portraits in *Les Fleurs* of God and the devil, good and evil, Jean Pommier's general observation that the collection lacks an overarching "système" or "cohérence" proves apposite (157). In contrast, an overarching "système"—one that opposes theodicy—does take form in Baudelaire's thought, as revealed in numerous texts subsequent to the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs*, and lends "coherence" to the later writings.

Edward Kaplan aptly describes a fundamental difference between Baudelaire's lyric poetry and his prose poems as a type of "conversion from 'poetic' idealism to a literature of daily experience" (1). This literature of daily experience involves expressions of charity toward marginal peoples, especially the poor, women, and the elderly. Charity in Baudelaire's poetry is also a major trope of the "Tableaux parisiens" section of the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Most readers of Baudelaire are familiar with "Le Cygne," in which the lyric voice sympathizes with suffering characters and classes of people. His empathy for Andromaque who mourns the loss of her homeland, for an emaciated and consumptive African woman who longs to return to her native Africa, and for forgotten castaways, informs the poem's metaphor of the swan that has escaped its cage in Paris, condemned to a futile search for home. "Le Cygne" ends with the lyric voice in remorseful contemplation of the earth's oppressed: "Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île, / Aux captifs, aux vaincus!… à bien d'autres encor!" (*OC* 1: 87).

In "Les Petites Vieilles," another poem from "Les Tableaux parisiens," the poet's charity is inspired by the spectacle of elderly women. In an ethical gesture, he commands us to love the

hunched-back, broken souls: "Brisés, bossus / Ou tordus, aimons-les!" (*OC* 1: 89). The poem lists a number of unfortunate incidents that have afflicted the aging women, and that evoke the image of a river of tears:

> L'une, par sa patrie au malheur exercée,
> L'autre, que son époux surchargea de douleurs,
> L'autre, par son enfant Madone transpercée,
> Toutes auraient pu faire un fleuve avec leurs pleurs! (*OC* 1: 90)

Whereas society at large neglects these unfortunate creatures ("Et nul ne vous salue, étranges destinées! / Débris d'humanité pour l'éternité mûrs!") the poet adopts them as his spiritual children ("Tout comme si j'étais votre père") and bids them each evening a solemn *adieu*. As is often the case with Baudelaire, the speaking subject's contemplation of human suffering leads to a consideration of God's nature. This somber poem concludes with an evocation of God not as the ultimate consoler of souls, but on the contrary as the cause of their suffering:

> Ruines! ma famille! ô cerveaux congénères!
> Je vous fais chaque soir un solennel adieu!
> Où serez-vous demain, Èves octogénaires,
> Sur qui pèse la griffe effroyable de Dieu? (*OC* 1: 91)

The juxtaposition between the poet's role as spiritual father who shows compassion for the elderly and the oppressive force of a merciless God is noteworthy. The poem's final image, God's dreadful claw, strongly echoes an age-old belief in the devil's talon, which would leave its seal on the foreheads of witches. This final stanza hints at a discrepancy between belief in a benevolent God and the reality of human suffering. The old women's destiny is not redeemed by reference to Catholic theology on the merits of suffering, as is the case for the lyrical voice in earlier poems such as "Bénédiction" and "Réversibilité." Rather, "Les Petites Vieilles" presents suffering as absurd, and termed "austere Misfortune": "Ces yeux mystérieux ont d'invincibles charmes / Pour celui que l'austère Infortune allaita!" (*OC* 1: 90). Given the emphasis placed on the absurdity of suffering, we should ask whether "Dieu" in this poem is a true entity, whom Baudelaire considers unjust, or whether the divine has become a signifier for the individual's miserable lot. In other words, does Baudelaire truly believe in (an evil) God?

Baudelaire as Critic of Religions

Not unlike "Les Petites Vieilles," passages from Baudelaire's essays take a critical approach to religion and the concept of God. In *La Morale du joujou* (1853), Baudelaire expresses admiration for the imagination of children, as demonstrated by their creative play with simple toys. To this description, Baudelaire adds a brief discussion of the effects of religion—namely, Protestantism—on children's imagination. More specifically, he berates parents who refuse to give toys to their children. According to Baudelaire, parents thereby deprive their children of an intense pleasure and stifle their imaginative faculties. Baudelaire likens parental parsimony to Protestantism:

> Il y a des parents qui n'en veulent jamais donner [de joujous]. Ce sont des personnes graves, excessivement graves, qui n'ont pas étudié la nature, et qui rendent généralement malheureux tous les gens qui les entourent. Je ne sais pas pourquoi je me figure qu'elles puent le protestantisme. Elles ne connaissent pas et ne permettent pas les moyens poétiques de passer le temps. Ce sont les mêmes gens qui donneraient volontiers un franc à un pauvre, à condition qu'il s'étouffât avec du pain, et lui refuseront toujours deux sous pour se désaltérer au cabaret. Quand je pense à une certaine classe de personnes ultra-raisonnables et anti-poétiques par qui j'ai tant souffert, je sens toujours la haine pincer et agiter mes nerfs. (*OC* 1: 586)

Here, Baudelaire reveals his thoughts on Protestantism as a frugal and anti-poetic religion. This form of Christianity, he implies, discourages its adherents from reveling in life's beauty and hinders creative thought. While an opposing argument can also be made, it is not difficult to understand Baudelaire's opinion of Protestantism as a frugal religion, emblematized by its desolate churches bereft of painting, sculpture, and precious jewels. What Baudelaire does not explicitly state, but which he implies is that Catholicism *is* indulgent and poetic—a religion whose art and ornamentation inspire one's imaginative faculties. These implications anticipate Baudelaire's praises of religion in the *Journaux intimes* (Protestantism notwithstanding) as that which most interests him ("Il n'y a d'intéressant sur la terre que les religions"), and that even without God, religion would be holy and divine ("Quand même Dieu n'existerait pas, la Religion serait encore Sainte et *Divine*;

OC 1: 696, 649). Whereas many poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* testify to Baudelaire's emotional investment in the Catholic notions of God, Satan, and sin, in light of the associations made in *La Morale du joujou* between imagination, poetry, and the Catholic religion, we can identify a second tendency in Baudelaire's thought at the time that critically examines the effects of religion on the minds of both children and poets. In this way, religion is considered less as divine revelation and more as the source of artistic inspiration. Accordingly, one could approach *La Morale du joujou* as a type of "art poétique" to be read alongside *Les Fleurs du Mal*. In light of the essay, it would make sense that the use of religious imagery in *Les Fleurs du Mal* does not reflect a coherent system of thought, such as a theological model, but rather, constitutes sources of inspiration that fuel the creative process by giving rise to a variety of images, visions, and themes.

In the *Salon de 1859,* Baudelaire appears to reverse the relationship between religion and the imagination. In this work devoted primarily to art, Baudelaire's commentary praises the imagination for its ability to create new worlds and new sensations by exploiting the possibilities embedded in the Real. To elaborate on this, Baudelaire celebrates various pieces of religious art by praising the role of the imagination—rather than of faith—in the artist's conception. Baudelaire begins the short chapter entitled "Religion, histoire, fantaisie" with the bold declaration that both impious artists and atheists have produced excellent religious works. He follows this with the statement that "la religion [est] la plus haute *fiction* de l'esprit humain" (*OC* 2: 628). As is often the case for italicized words in Baudelaire's writing, the stress placed on "fiction" signals to the reader that the critic has carefully chosen the signifier for its multiple meanings. While its more common rendering denotes something unreal, a less common and older rendering refers to something that is created, fabricated, or invented. By virtue of drawing special attention to the word, Baudelaire alerts the otherwise unsuspecting reader to the less common usage of *fiction*. And yet, by choosing the term he deliberately invites both interpretations, thereby suggesting that religious works are something of a fantasy rather than history or ontological truth. In so doing, Baudelaire moves from his thesis in *La Morale du joujou* of religion (Catholicism) as a stimulus of the imagination to suggesting that it is the self who "imagines" the divine (*OC* 2: 628).

Baudelaire pursues this highly suggestive style of writing by stating in parentheses that he is speaking as if he were an unbelieving art professor, and that the reader should draw no conclusions regarding his own faith: "Je parle exprès comme parlerait un athée professeur de beaux-arts, et rien n'en doit être conclu contre ma foi" (*OC* 2: 628). And yet, instead of outright refuting inevitable doubts that his readers will entertain regarding his religious faith, Baudelaire provides at best a very weak affirmation of his faith by stating that readers cannot infer anything about his personal beliefs from his writings. To be sure, this parenthetical remark further aggravates rather than alleviates the reader's suspicions of the critic's lack of faith in God. The elusive nature of Baudelaire's comments on his own faith suggests that he is aware of the radical nature of his thoughts, which he tries to mitigate by playing a game of cat and mouse with the reader.

Baudelaire then proceeds to explain exactly how an unbeliever can produce a religious work of art. The answer is that the artist can do this by tapping into his imagination. Such a deliberate act, as Baudelaire asserts, counters the proclamation made by Jesus in John 3:8 that "The wind blows wherever it pleases" (*OC* 2: 629). According to Baudelaire, "L'art est le seul domaine spirituel où l'homme puisse dire: 'Je croirai si je veux, et si je ne veux pas, je ne croirai pas" (*OC* 2: 629). In his praise of the artist's inspiration as belonging to his own faculties, Baudelaire unequivocally rejects Jesus's statement on the individual's irrelevance in God's choice to grace certain individuals with his spirit: "La cruelle et humiliante maxime: *Spiritus flat ubi vult*, perd ses droits en matière d'art" (*OC* 2: 629). What Baudelaire is in fact saying is that for an artist to create a sublime piece of religious art, he needs not divine intervention but rather his own faculty of imagination: "L'artiste peut produire un bon tableau de religion, pourvu que son imagination soit apte à s'élever jusque-là" (*OC* 2: 629). If Delacroix painted glowing chapels ablaze with light ("chapelles ardentes"), it is because his imagination was no less ardent: "Son imagination, ardente comme les chapelles ardentes, brille de toutes les flammes et de toutes les pourpres" (*OC* 2: 632). In Baudelaire's *Salon*, God as a concept is very much alive, and praised by the art critic as a sublime subject worthy of an artist's disciplined exploitation of the imagination. Conversely, God as an actual being independent of the imagination is nowhere to be found. This understanding of art

and religion illuminates Baudelaire's declaration in his journal that even if God didn't exist, Religion would still be holy and divine (*OC* 1: 649).[4]

Realism and Theodicy in *Les Paradis artificiels*

In *Les Paradis artificiels* (1860), Baudelaire adopts an ethical position for realism and against idealism by engaging in questions of theodicy.[5] In the course of his argument, Baudelaire redefines the notion of prayer by subtracting God himself from the act, and ends by underscoring the absurdity that underlies justifications of God's existence in the face of extreme human suffering. Baudelaire presents both parts of *Les Paradis artificiels*—an essay on hashish entitled "Le Poème du hachisch" and a loose translation of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*—as testimonies to the harmful effects of drug-induced mind states, not just because of the user's state of dependency, but also because the latter loses all notion of reality. In the introduction to his essay on hashish, Baudelaire contrasts two methods of temporarily escaping one's "habitus of mire": prayer and the "pharmacy" (*OC* 1: 401–03). He makes clear from the first pages his preference for the former and disapproval of the latter. Whereas hallucinogens amount to an abdication of the will, prayer is a healthful medium for the individual to taste infinity (*OC* 1: 401, 438). Baudelaire condemns the use of hallucinogens because it amounts to the attempt to escape the reality of earthly existence, whereas in prayer the self remains keenly aware of its true state of being. The majority of the essay decries the individual's attempt to flee "les intérêts terrestres," and claims that he who does sells his soul: "En effet, tout homme qui n'accepte pas les conditions de la vie, vend son âme" (*OC* 1: 438). *Les Paradis artificiels* signals Baudelaire's new concern for the Real, which he equates with suffering. While Baudelaire maintains an interest in prayer, it is not clear in this essay what in fact he means by the term.

In the early sections of "Le Poème du hachisch," the poet delights in those rare moments in which one awakens "avec un génie jeune et vigoureux," in which "le monde extérieur s'offre à lui avec un relief puissant, une netteté de contours, une richesse de couleurs admirables," and in which "le monde moral ouvre ses vastes perspectives, pleines de clartés nouvelles" (*OC* 1: 401). He asks

whether such a rare but enlightened state of spiritual being is not the result of "une bonne hygiène et d'un régime de sage," or "de la prière assidue et des ardeurs spirituelles" (*OC* 1: 401). It is not until the conclusion that Baudelaire seems to provide an answer to his question, which is worthy to be cited at length:

> Mais l'homme n'est pas si abandonné, si privé de moyens honnêtes pour gagner le ciel, qu'il soit obligé d'invoquer la pharmacie […]. Je me figure un homme (dirai-je un brahmane, un poète, ou un philosophe chrétien?) placé sur l'Olympe ardu de la spiritualité; autour de lui, les Muses de Raphaël ou de Mantegna, pour le consoler de ses longs jeûnes et de ses prières assidues, combinent les danses les plus nobles, le regardent avec leurs plus doux yeux et leurs sourires les plus éclatants; le divin Apollon, ce maître en tout savoir […] caresse de son archet ses cordes les plus vibrantes. Au-dessous de lui, au pied de la montagne, dans les ronces et dans la boue, la troupe des humains, la bande des ilotes, simule les grimaces de la jouissance et pousse des hurlements que lui arrache la morsure du poison; et le poète attristé se dit: "Ces infortunés qui n'ont ni jeûné, ni prié, et qui ont refusé la rédemption par le travail, demandent à la noire magie les moyens de s'élever, d'un seul coup, à l'existence surnaturelle. La magie les dupe et elle allume pour eux un faux bonheur et une fausse lumière; tandis que nous, poètes et philosophes, nous avons régénéré notre âme par le travail successif et la contemplation; par l'exercice assidu de la volonté et la noblesse permanente de l'intention, nous avons créé à notre usage un jardin de vraie beauté. Confiants dans la parole qui dit que la foi transporte les montagnes, nous avons accompli le seul miracle dont Dieu nous ait octroyé la licence!" (*OC* 1: 441)

For the individual to lift itself above the quotidian, Baudelaire recommends a disciplined regimen including arduous prayer. Except for a reference to Jesus's words in the Gospels about the individual's ability through faith to move mountains, the type of spiritual life advocated is not specifically Christian. In fact, the believer described here can have the qualities of a Brahman, a poet, or a Christian philosopher. In referencing Apollo and the muses of Raphael and of Mantegna as the hosts of the individual's heightened spiritual consciousness, Baudelaire does not differentiate between ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions.

The passage treats prayer as just one of several spiritual acts recommended, including fasting and hard work. Accordingly, what

Baudelaire seems to be advocating is, in fact, a lifestyle. Curiously, toward the end of the passage, Baudelaire rephrases the components of the individual's spiritual behavior as "constant work and meditation; through the conscientious use of our Will, and the enduring loftiness of our Purpose."[6] Suddenly, prayer disappears, or rather, is replaced with "méditation." Given the neutral stance of the passage vis-à-vis any specific religion, and a focus on concepts such as contemplation, assiduous exercise of the will, and determination, it would seem that the type of prayer that Baudelaire has in mind is general meditation. In the passage of the *Journaux intimes* subtitled "Hygiène. Conduite. Méthode," the poet's avowal of his daily prayers to God as a reservoir of his strength and of justice, but also to his father, his childhood nurse, and Edgar Poe as intercessors who motivate him to carry on his work, as well as his association of prayer with the most strict sobriety that includes the suppression of excitants, further suggest that what Baudelaire meant by prayer was a meditative lifestyle (*OC* 1: 673).[7]

Baudelaire's advocacy for disciplined meditation as an alternative to hallucinogens in the conclusion to "Le Poème du hachisch" is overshadowed, however, by a wealth of passages in both the "Poème" and in "Un mangeur d'opium" that paint a negative portrayal of the individual's attempt to escape the realities of daily existence. Baudelaire's declaration that "tout homme qui n'accepte pas les conditions de la vie, vend son âme" resonates throughout *Les Paradis artificiels* (*OC* 1: 438). He makes it clear that the attempt to escape the Real has moral implications. In "Un mangeur d'opium," Baudelaire underscores De Quincey's success in significantly reducing his opium consumption. As a direct result, the English essayist regained a joyful spirit, the motivation to work, a love for one's neighbor, and charity: "De nouveau abondait en lui cette légèreté, cette gaieté d'esprit, […] également favorables au travail et à l'exercice de la fraternité. Cet esprit de bienveillance et de compassion pour le prochain, disons plus, de charité […] s'exerça un beau jour" (*OC* 1: 473).

In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, which Baudelaire often transcribes in the third-person singular and interjects with his own commentary, De Quincey recounts his repeated efforts to escape the hardships of earthly living for a more ethereal but delusional state of mind. The addict describes himself as having a personality predisposed to drugs. As he explains, his life was

marked by his search for "silent retreats" propitious for "meditation" in order to escape life's tribulations:

> J'irai me promener dehors; j'oublierai aujourd'hui mes vieilles peines; l'air est frais et calme; les montagnes sont hautes et s'étendent au loin vers le ciel; […] et ainsi je cesserai enfin d'être malheureux. […] Paysage de montagnes, retraite silencieuse, luxe, ou plutôt bien-être solide, vaste loisir pour la méditation, hiver rigoureux, propre à concentrer les facultés de l'esprit. (qtd. in Baudelaire, *OC* 1: 475–76, 487)

Furthermore, De Quincey himself, in light of opium's ravages, would qualify his constant longings for solitude as an extreme taste ("goût immodéré"; *OC* 1: 503).

De Quincey explains that he sought in opium a source of consolation ("des moyens de consolation"; *OC* 1: 469). His confessions describe in detail the complete loss of sense of reality while under the influence, and explains that an opium eater is "too happy" to be aware of time's passage (*OC* 1: 469). In his commentary, Baudelaire emphasizes what he sees as the drug's most harmful effect—the diversion of thought from "terrestrial interests": "Quelle solitude est plus grande, plus calme, plus séparée du monde des intérêts terrestres, que celle créée par l'opium?" (*OC* 1: 497). Baudelaire's description of hashish's effects recounts this same lack of awareness, and a complete loss of reason. In the hashish smoker's state of bliss, the world's contradictions magically disappear, and all existential angst dissolves: "Toute contradiction s'efface, tous les problèmes philosophiques deviennent limpides, ou du moins paraissent tels. Tout est matière à jouissance" (*OC* 1: 434). If one can speak of "thought" while under the influence of hashish, Baudelaire insists that it is wrought with sophisms, and characterized by extreme optimism in which fantasy is mistaken for reality ("Les sophismes du hachisch sont nombreux et admirables, tendant généralement à l'optimisme, et l'un des principaux, le plus efficace, est celui qui transforme le désir en réalité"; *OC* 1: 432).

In the final sections of "Un mangeur d'opium," Baudelaire translates select passages of *Suspiria*, De Quincey's sequel to the *Confessions* in which he describes several visions that he experienced while under the drug's influence. In the preface to the translation, Baudelaire describes the tone of the visions as "étranger à

l'humanité," as "moitié extra-terrestre" (*OC* 1: 496). Among the handful of visions that Baudelaire chooses to translate as a demonstration of the "extra-terrestrial" nature of De Quincey's thought processes is "Savannah-la-Mar," a chapter/section that he places just before his conclusion to the translation. This is a vision that, in the context of Baudelaire's preface, directly engages in questions of theodicy. Savannah-la-Mar is a port on the southern coast of Jamaica that, in 1780, suffered from a freakish combination of fire, earthquake, hurricane, and tidal wave. In De Quincey's vision, God smites the coastal town and proclaims that he will preserve the city's ruins as a monument to his mysterious wrath. Accompanied by a "Dark Interpreter," De Quincey visits the city and takes note of the "silent dormitories" where children sleep in death ("les silencieux dortoirs où tous les enfants dormaient depuis cinq générations"; *OC* 1: 514). De Quincey's "Interpreter" performs his assigned role by providing the visionary with an explanation of this awful sight, which is important to cite at length:

> Voilà qui est mélancolique et déplorable; mais une moindre calamité n'aurait pas suffi pour les desseins de Dieu. Comprends bien ceci. ... Le temps présent se réduit à un point mathématique, et même ce point mathématique périt mille fois avant que nous ayons pu affirmer sa naissance. Dans le présent, tout est fini, et aussi bien ce fini est infini dans la vélocité de sa fuite vers la mort. Mais en Dieu, il n'y a rien de fini; en Dieu il n'y a rien de transitoire; et en Dieu il n'y a rien qui tende vers la mort. Il s'ensuit que pour Dieu le présent n'existe pas. Pour Dieu, le présent, c'est le futur, et c'est pour le futur qu'il sacrifie le présent de l'homme. C'est pourquoi il opère par le tremblement de terre. C'est pourquoi il travaille par la douleur. Oh! profond est le labourage du tremblement de terre! Oh! profond […] est le labour de la douleur! mais il ne faut pas moins que cela pour l'agriculture de Dieu. Sur une nuit de tremblement de terre, il bâtit à l'homme d'agréables habitations pour mille ans. De la douleur d'un enfant, il tire de glorieuses vendanges spirituelles qui, autrement, n'auraient pas pu être récoltées. Avec des charrues moins cruelles, le sol réfractaire n'aurait pas été remué. À la terre, notre planète, à l'habitacle de l'homme, il faut la secousse; et la douleur est plus souvent encore nécessaire comme étant le plus puissant outil de Dieu; —oui (et il me regardait avec un air solennel), elle est indispensable aux enfants mystérieux de la terre! (*OC* 1: 514–15)

This vision of God's resort to earthquakes as a sign of his anger surely reminded Baudelaire of a well-known quarrel among eighteenth-century *philosophes*—notably Rousseau and Voltaire—of the conclusions concerning God and evil that were drawn from the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. De Quincey's vision raises the same question of theodicy: how can we account for what appears to us as evil—in this case the death of children—if we continue to believe in an all-powerful, benevolent God? As the lengthy quote demonstrates, De Quincey's "Dark Interpreter" goes to great lengths to explain as something that ultimately serves a greater good that which the individual perceives as pure evil. The Interpreter asserts that God's most powerful tool is suffering, which he inflicts on a child to convert many others. And to minimize the disturbing nature of this vision of suffering children, the Interpreter provides a convoluted description of God's perspective. He resorts to the mathematical possibility of infinitely dividing time to show that for God, the present does not exist, and therefore can be sacrificed. Many moralists and ethicists from at least the Enlightenment onward would have objected to such an argument, which entirely replaces the individual's earthly perspective with a hypothetical perspective from on high. In light of Baudelaire's assertion of the mind's sophistry and ungrounded optimism under the influence of hallucinogens, the theodicy offered in "Savannah-la-Mar*"* is meant to be perceived as absurd, and of the same nature as theoretical chatter among theologians that has little to do with (the) reality (of evil).

Baudelaire's main purpose in translating De Quincey's vision was to oppose the delusional state induced by opium consumption to the individual's ethical duty to confront human suffering. Baudelaire makes this clear in the commentary that he adjoins to his translation of "Savannah-la-Mar," in which he summarizes the *Confessions* and the *Suspiria* as a "commentaire souvent noir, amer, désolé," as the somber portrait of "le caractère moral de notre auteur, […] pensée solitaire qui aspire à s'envoler de ce sol et loin du théâtre des luttes humaines" (*OC* 1: 515). In fact, he describes the final pages of *Suspiria* as "quelque chose de funèbre, de corrodé, et d'aspirant ailleurs qu'aux choses de la terre" (*OC* 1: 516). The implications for Baudelaire's own thought on God, evil, and the ethical demands placed on writers are evident. They announce an

evolution in the poet's thought in which the notion of God, described as a distraction from earthly concerns, becomes divorced from consideration of the Good.

Baudelaire's much studied prose poem "Le Gâteau" takes on richer meaning when we bear in mind passages from the contemporaneous essays in their move away from Idealism and God, and toward the Real and charity. The opening paragraph describes a rare state of spiritual bliss in which the narrator takes delight in a paradisiacal landscape that transports him away from the ugliness of the world:

> Mes pensées voltigaient avec une légèreté égale à celle de l'atmosphère; les passions vulgaires, telles que la haine et l'amour profane, m'apparaissaient maintenant aussi éloignées que les nuées défilaient au fond des abîmes sous mes pieds; mon âme me semblait aussi vaste et aussi pure que la coupole du ciel dont j'étais enveloppé; le souvenir des choses terrestres n'arrivait à mon cœur qu'affaibli et diminué, comme le son de la clochette des bestiaux imperceptibles qui paissaient loin, bien loin, sur le versant d'une autre montagne. (*OC* 1: 297)

This opening scene closely resembles descriptions of the opium eater in Baudelaire's *Paradis artificiels* who would seek solitude in high altitudes for much the same reason as he would consume opium, that is to say, in order to forget worldly concerns. In a moment of inner peace, the narrator forgets about "des choses terrestres," and even entertains the belief in the individual's goodness: "Je crois même que, dans ma parfaite béatitude et dans mon total oubli de tout le mal terrestre, j'en étais venu à ne plus trouver si ridicules les journaux qui prétendent que l'homme est né bon" (*OC* 1: 297–98). However, the prose poem abruptly draws the narrator out of his naïve reverie. More specifically, once fatigue and hunger interrupt the daydream and the narrator takes out some bread to eat, a disheveled boy appears, dressed in rags. When the narrator notices the boy's eyes devouring his bread, he gives the child a slice. However, the ragamuffin is suddenly knocked over by another. Before the traveler, the two children engage in a violent "guerre fratricide," consisting of punches, hair pulling, spitting, cursing, and strangling, until the bread has been reduced to crumbs. Needless to say, this spectacle disillusions the narrator, whose blissful moment of inner peace and belief in a good world

vanishes. This sobering conclusion does nothing if not reconfirm the existence of evil.

The poem presents two very different states of hunger. Despite the narrator's hunger, which is more of a temporary annoyance, he has the kindness to share his bread. The boys' hunger, a type of prolonged physical and mental suffering, can be deduced from their appearance: "Devant moi se tenait un petit être déguenillé, noir, ébouriffé […] les yeux creux" (*OC* 1: 298). Such a description unequivocally categorizes the brothers among the lowest class of society. Their social status is conveyed by the description not just of their appearance, but also of their language, which the narrator identifies as a "patois." These details suggest that what provokes the "guerre fratricide" is the result of a lifetime of extreme poverty. While elsewhere Baudelaire depicts evil as part of human nature, in "Le Gâteau" evil also issues from oppressive social conditions. As this poem contrasts what can be considered a romantic idealism that is a primary characteristic of *Les Fleurs du Mal* with the realism that coalesces in *Le Spleen de Paris*, Steve Murphy is correct to point out in *Logiques du dernier Baudelaire* that "Le Gâteau" directs itself against "a young Baudelaire steeped in [the idealism of] Lamartinism" (my translation; "le jeune Baudelaire confit en lamartinisme"; 309). Accordingly, the ethical move in a work like *Les Paradis artificiels* that forsakes the distractions of idealism—including God—to reaffirm the sufferings of daily existence has a direct bearing on the prose poems.

Baudelaire on Hugo's *Les Misérables*

Baudelaire's writing "against theodicy" also appears to be the system of thought underlying his literary review of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862). In his commentary on the novel's portrayal of injustice and human misery, Baudelaire explains that Hugo attributes evil to present social laws. Baudelaire quotes Hugo's preface, which states:

> Tant qu'il existera, par le fait des lois et des mœurs, une damnation sociale créant artificiellement, en pleine civilisation, des enfers et compliquant d'une fatalité humaine la destinée qui est divine… tant qu'il y aura sur la terre ignorance et misère, des livres de la nature de celui-ci pourront ne pas être inutiles. (*OC* 2: 218)

Baudelaire joins Hugo in denouncing the dehumanizing effects of society. He even suggests editing the passage so that it boldly highlights society's evil nature by changing the expression "tant que" to "TOUJOURS": "'Tant que…!' Hélas! autant dire TOUJOURS!" (*OC* 2: 218). In contrast to Hugo, who understands social injustice as historically contingent, Baudelaire's recommended edits suggest that oppression is an inherent dimension of society. By this ahistorical gesture, he appears to anticipate Nietzsche's ideas about the inevitable hierarchies and sufferings of the social classes.

For the majority of the essay, Baudelaire curtails his own thoughts on society to devote attention to Hugo's treatment of evil. ("Mais ce n'est pas ici le lieu d'analyser de telles questions"). He summarizes that in *Les Misérables*, although individuals commit the crimes, the justice system is responsible. Commenting on Jean Valjean, Baudelaire notes:

> Valjean, c'est la brute naïve, innocente; c'est le prolétaire ignorant, coupable, d'une faute que nous absoudrions tous sans aucun doute (le vol d'un pain), mais qui, punie légalement, le jette dans l'école du Mal, c'est-à-dire au Bagne. Là, son esprit se forme et s'affine dans les lourdes méditations de l'esclavage. Finalement, il en sort subtil, redoubtable et dangereux. (*OC* 2: 221–22)

Unsatisfied with the thesis that humans commit malicious acts as a result of social conditioning, in the final paragraphs of the review Baudelaire no longer holds back from interjecting his own thoughts on the matter. Although he certainly links evil with society, he proceeds to draw further conclusions regarding the nature of the individual and of God. Rather than blame Satan for evil, as the lyric voice of *Les Fleurs* does repeatedly, the critic finds that God or the individual must ultimately be responsible. Accordingly, Baudelaire expresses surprise and skepticism toward Hugo's belief in the inherent goodness of both the individual and God:

> Victor Hugo est pour l'Homme, et *cependant* il n'est pas contre Dieu. Il a confiance en Dieu, et *pourtant* il n'est pas contre l'Homme. Il repousse le délire de l'Athéisme en révolte, et cependant il n'approuve pas les gloutonneries sanguinaires des Molochs et des Teutatès. Il croit que l'Homme est né bon, et *cependant*, *même* devant ses désastres permanents, il n'accuse pas la férocité et la malice de Dieu. (*OC* 2: 224; emphasis added)

In mocking Hugo's line of reasoning by juxtaposing a series of seeming inconsistencies, Baudelaire implies that the individual and God cannot *both* be exonerated from evil. In fact, by making reference to the individual's as well as God's acts of crime, he suggests that both are guilty. While he agrees with Hugo that evil issues from social structures, he attributes it to the penchants of its citizens. If society is evil, it is because those who govern are. This comes as no surprise for readers familiar with *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863) in which Baudelaire, in generalizing the Catholic notion of Original Sin, unequivocally equates the individual's nature with evil: "La nature ne peut conseiller que le crime. […] Le mal se fait sans effort, *naturellement*, par fatalité" (*OC* 2: 715). But Baudelaire also strongly implies that Hugo neglects to accuse God of his "ferocity" and "malice" in permitting, if not orchestrating, the world's catastrophes. Baudelaire's use of adverbs of opposition such as *cependant*, *pourtant*, and *même* highlights the discrepancy at the core of theodicy. Unlike Hugo, Baudelaire cannot justify the existence both of evil and of a benevolent deity.

While both God and the individual are cast as evildoers, this passage places a much stronger emphasis on divine malice. The only reference to the individual's iniquities is a vague reference to Hugo's rejection of an extreme form of militant atheism ("le délire de l'Athéisme en révolte"), which might conjure up in the reader's mind bloody images of *La Terreur*. In contrast, Baudelaire strongly underscores God's cruelty through a number of negative terms and expressions including *férocité, malice, désastres permanents,* and *gloutonneries sanguinaires*. It would seem that above all, Baudelaire takes aim at Hugo's faith in God. But in light of passages analyzed earlier concerning Baudelaire's evolving perspective on religion, prayer, and God in the face of human suffering, couldn't Baudelaire's condemnation of God here also be interpreted as the prelude to, if not the guise for, the denial of his existence?

The prose poem "La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse" forms part of Baudelaire's sustained reflection on evil and God, and offers a highly suggestive commentary similar to the *Les Misérables* review. In this prose poem, a misogynistic man who refers to himself as a poet takes his coquettish mistress to a sideshow in order to teach her a lesson. The attraction features a woman repeatedly beaten by her husband. The poet refers to the woman as a monster, for she is caged and disguised in animal skins. He then temporarily

steps out of character to absolve both man and woman of all reproach and to blame the violent scene—including the husband's cruelty—on God: "Telles sont les mœurs conjugales de ces deux descendants d'Ève et d'Adam, ces œuvres de vos mains, ô mon Dieu! […] Dans le monde où elle a été jetée, elle n'a jamais pu croire que la femme méritât une autre destinée" (*OC* 1: 290). By reasoning that Original Sin and a good God cannot coexist, the poet concludes that God is responsible for evil. But is it possible to read the poet's address to God ironically?[8] Given Baudelaire's belief in the criminal nature of humans, it seems unlikely that readers are meant to interpret the poem as an exoneration of the individual. In fact, the poem's conclusion, in which the misogynist threatens to treat his mistress like the caged woman ("Si vous me fatiguez trop souvent de vos *précieuses* pleurnicheries, je vous traiterai en *femme sauvage*") reaffirms the individual's penchant for cruelty (*OC* 1: 290). In fact, it is clear that the poet utilizes the notion of divine wickedness as a pretext for his own cruelty. It would seem that God has little to do with human actions here. Either he remains passive in allowing human cruelty, or he is simply a fictitious scapegoat. In light of God's wickedness in "Bénédiction," "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre," "Les Petites Vieilles," *Les Paradis artificiels*, and the commentary on *Les Misérables,* it would appear that this poem does not rehabilitate a good God at the expense of the individual. To confirm my reading of the prose poem and the review of *Les Misérables* as preludes to atheism and as highly suggestive of God's nonexistence, I would like to turn to "Mademoiselle Bistouri" in which the *je* once again questions God's goodness through another discussion of human "monsters."

Secular Conversion in "Mademoiselle Bistouri"

"Mademoiselle Bistouri," one of Baudelaire's last prose poems, takes up the question of theodicy, in part, through the mode of prayer. Traditionally, scholars have focused their attention on the enigmatic figure of the title character while not sufficiently accounting for the implications of its concluding prayer. At the poem's outset, the narrator is accosted on the street by a woman who mistakes him for a surgeon, and invites him to follow her to a hovel. Inside, she implies that she is a prostitute who seeks out surgeons as clients. The intrigued narrator proceeds to question her

about her peculiar interest. She reveals her perverse attraction to blood and the dissection of human flesh. She explains that she asks doctors to come visit her with their operating instruments, and to wear their aprons soiled with blood. Not only does Mlle Bistouri limit her clients to surgeons, but also at times she does not even charge them a fee. In fact, her obsession compels her frequently to feign illness as a pretext to call on the doctors. The narrator adopts the role of the probing psychologist in order to identify the origin of these morbid desires: "Peux-tu te souvenir de l'époque et de l'occasion où est née en toi cette passion si particulière?" However, Mlle Bistouri can give no explanation: "Je ne sais pas… je ne me souviens pas" (*OC* 1: 355). Accordingly, the poem ends with more questions than answers.

The one conclusion that the narrator draws is that "la vie fourmille de monstres innocents" (*OC* 1: 355). After all, the poem recounts the narrator's encounter with a "monstre" who prompts him to consider the multitude of other "monstres innocents" that populate the modern city and that he frequently happens upon during his urban wanderings. Immediately following his reflection on the existence of "monsters," the narrator's thoughts seem naturally to turn to God, whom he addresses in prayer:

> Seigneur, mon Dieu! vous, le Créateur, vous, le Maître; vous qui avez fait la Loi et la Liberté; vous, le souverain qui laissez faire, vous le juge qui pardonnez; vous qui êtes plein de motifs et de causes, et qui avez peut-être mis dans mon esprit le goût de l'horreur pour convertir mon cœur, comme la guérison au bout d'une lame; Seigneur, ayez pitié, ayez pitié des fous et des folles! Ô Créateur! peut-il exister des monstres aux yeux de Celui-là seul qui sait pourquoi ils existent, comment ils *se sont faits* et comment ils auraient pu *ne pas se faire*? (*OC* 1: 355–56; Baudelaire's emphasis)

This is a paradoxical prayer on many levels. For instance, by suggesting that a good and just God would not allow monsters to exist ("peut-il exister des monstres…"), the narrator seems to negate his own conclusion that "life swarms with innocent monsters," and by extension, invalidates the story of his encounter with Mlle Bistouri that he has just recounted. However, for obvious reasons this interpretation is problematic. It seems more logical to read the poem ironically. Although on the surface the narrator appears to

be questioning the existence of monsters, he is actually questioning the existence of God. If the reader is convinced, as is the poet, that "life swarms with innocent monsters," and that the narrator did in fact meet a Mlle Bistouri (no scholar has proposed that the encounter constitutes a dream or a hallucination), and if the reader follows the narrator's reasoning that evil and a good, omnipotent God cannot coexist, then it would follow that it is God's existence that is placed in doubt.[9] We find in the poem's conclusion a rhetoric almost identical to that of Baudelaire's review of *Les Misérables*. But whereas some readers might not readily pick up on the irony of the review, the prose poem's irony is undeniable and helps inform our interpretation of Baudelaire's commentary on Hugo.

The use of irony in the conclusion to "Mademoiselle Bistouri" is also made evident through the use of repetition ("vous, le Créateur… vous, le Maître… vous, le juge…"). During his prayer, the narrator pronounces a lengthy and repetitive enumeration of God's goodness and forgiving qualities, which paradoxically casts doubt on the existence of God. More specifically, the description of a pure and righteous God conflicts with the morbidity of contemporary society that the body of the prose poem illustrates. Whereas throughout the ages, theologians have frequently debated whether God's goodness and evil can coexist, the poem suggests that the polarities of good and evil themselves are false. In his *Journaux intimes*, Baudelaire writes: "La Théologie. Qu'est-ce que la chute? Si c'est l'unité devenue dualité, c'est Dieu qui a chuté" (*OC* 1: 688). This cryptic statement, which has inspired a number of interpretations, when considered in light of texts such as "Mademoiselle Bistouri" or *Les Paradis artificiels*, seems to say that one who believes in a dualist system structured on the coexistence of pure good and the undeniable reality of evil must ultimately lose faith in God.

The poem's irony is further conveyed through underscoring. While the narrator addresses his prayer to the "Créateur," the emphasis placed on the reflexive verb *se faire* through repetition and italicization highlights the lack of agency—whether human or divine—with regard to the existence of monsters. This emphasis not only questions the existence of a Creator, but also recalls the narrator's failure to understand the cause of the prostitute's morbid behavior and unhealthy desires. Evil here does not appear to

be the responsibility of human agents, whether it be a ruling class or Mlle Bistouri. In fact, Mlle Bistouri seems to be the victim of some destructive psychic force just as much as she is the perpetrator of evil, hence the poet's insistence on the word *innocent*. As Murphy has stated in his own study, Mlle Bistouri seeks a doctor who understands that a woman's simulation of illness can be the very symptom of an illness (514). Baudelaire's poem certainly anticipates Freud's theories of the unconscious by intimating an origin of desires hidden in the opaque self. With this poem, Baudelaire has come a long way from *Les Fleurs du Mal,* in which the individual's evil thoughts are at times attributed to, or at least personified by, exterior forces or devilish figures. Other scholars have also identified in the portrait of Mlle Bistouri a critique of society's complicity in prostitution in mid-nineteenth-century France, which only adds to the complexity of Baudelaire's perspective on evil as something both bodily and sociological.[10]

In her study of the poem, Maria Scott proffers an interesting theory that the narrator of "Mademoiselle Bistouri" is a priest. She bases this supposition on her study of a seventeenth-century text to which the prose poem explicitly refers, and in which the professions of priest and doctor are confused. Scott also cites the concluding prayer of the prose poem as supporting evidence: "In view of the prayer that concludes Baudelaire's text, it is conceivable that Mlle Bistouri mistakes a priest for a doctor" (60). This interpretation does not seem farfetched. In another prose poem, "Déjà!," the narrator identifies with priests, notably those who lose faith (*OC* 1: 338), and in his *Journaux intimes* Baudelaire makes strong associations between poets (the primary identity of his narrator) and the clergy (*OC* 1: 693–94). If it is the case that Baudelaire had in mind a priest while writing "Mademoiselle Bistouri," then the prayer's irony is only further accentuated. Halfway through the prayer, in his enumeration of God's divine qualities, the narrator mentions the Lord's having converted his heart "like a cure at knife point" ("comme la guérison au bout d'une lame"; *OC* 1: 356).[11] But what kind of conversion does the text actually suggest? As the prayer is shot through with irony in which it leads to the conclusion of God's nonexistence, a religious conversion would be understood as fictional as well. If the narrator is in fact a priest, then the poem recounts not only the story of a prostitute, but also that of a priest who loses his faith upon encountering the innocent

monster that is Mlle Bistouri. The name "Bistouri," as the French word for scalpel, inevitably refers to the prostitute's gruesome obsessions. As the narrator likens his "conversion" to "a cure at knife point," the poem seems to suggest that the priest's encounter with Mlle Bistouri has led to his loss of faith, or rather to what could be called a "secular conversion" to a non-theological perspective on evil. What "Mademoiselle Bistouri" does is recount a loss of faith by way of an intellectual engagement with questions of theodicy.[12]

Through a comparative textual analysis of passages from Baudelaire's critical essays and poetry, I have highlighted a recurring "writing against theodicy" that takes shape in Baudelaire's thought. It chronologically parallels and is conceptually linked to changes in the poet's esthetics from a metaphysical poetics of idealism to a more "realist" poetry of charity. Whereas the 1857 publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* does not constitute a coherent system of thought, at least with respect to theological concepts, I hope to have shown that Baudelaire begins to articulate a philosophy of the incompatibility of God and evil in subsequent writings. It unites and informs otherwise seemingly very different texts, from *La Morale du joujou*, essays on art, on contemporary novels, and on psychedelic drugs, to the lyric poetry of "Tableaux parisiens" and the prose poems of *Le Spleen de Paris*. If Baudelaire's "writing against theodicy" in any given text emerges only obliquely, whether through irony or through other ways implied by the text, a consideration of the texts alongside one another renders this philosophy striking. There are many reasons that could explain why Baudelaire did not more explicitly reject the notion of God. The most obvious is that he feared further imperial sanctions for moral indecency. Another could be that even the unbelieving Baudelaire viscerally hesitated to claim God's nonexistence as one taboo he could not break. The exclamation—"Cré nom!"—short for "Sacré nom"—which Baudelaire repeated incessantly in the months in which he suffered from complications from syphilis leading to his death, suggests the ongoing battle that the poet waged with God. The next chapter will in fact serve the purpose of adding psychological depth to Baudelaire's highly reflective, philosophical system of "writing against theodicy." A continuous investment in the religious in the prose poems will provide us with a more complex picture of the poet's project of secularization.

Chapter Two

The Mourning of God and the Ironies of Secularization in Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*

The abundant ambiguities and contradictions in Baudelaire's poems, essays, and correspondence regarding his perspective on divine matters present us with the challenge of adequately positioning *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris* at the intersection of religious and secular thought. Whereas Baudelaire recurrently proclaimed his simultaneous attraction toward God and the devil, and avowed his habit of praying at all hours of the day, he also declared his unbelief in an invisible being.[1] At times, both his interest in and rejection of the spiritual are expressed in close proximity within the same text.[2] The most common conclusion that studies have drawn from the nature of Baudelaire's religiosity is one that the poet's statements on belief in God. For instance, scholars have generally agreed that Baudelaire espoused the Catholic belief in Original Sin and the wickedness of the individual's natural or fallen state all the while rejecting any notion of salvation.[3] This perspective corroborates my description in Chapter 1 of a "writing against theodicy" that, in perceiving the incompatibility of God and evil, elects to subtract God from poetic and philosophical treatments of human suffering and wickedness. But this version of Original Sin is most interesting because it suggests a hybrid vision of evil that is neither wholly Catholic nor wholly secular. In fact, it only begins to highlight the complexity of secularization in Baudelaire's thought, and which I hope to expound upon through the study of seeming inconsistencies in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but especially in *Le Spleen de Paris*. A multidimensional process at both the social and individual levels, secularization involves a dynamics of opposing psychic forces that will help explain ambiguities that traverse Baudelaire's body of work. In turn, ambiguities at the heart of Baudelaire's poetry will inform the complexities of secularization's cultural phenomenon. Whereas I argued in Chapter 1

that a philosophical system that rejects the notion of God emerges in Baudelaire's later writings, in this chapter I will bring to light a survival of psychic investment in the mystical that resists the "death of God" by expressing itself as a yearning for that which has been lost.

The sections that follow attempt to uncover movements of "recoil" within the process of secularization at work in Baudelaire's poetry that will add psychological depth to his philosophical system of "writing against theodicy." A distinctive dynamics of Baudelaire's prose poetry reveals the complexity of secularization not as simply a linear movement consisting in the gradual embrace of a non-theological worldview, but more accurately as a dialogical process that entails recurring and simultaneous movements both away from as well as toward the religious. Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," which describes the ambivalent or "oppositional" relationship that the ego experiences with its lost love object, will help us to understand the currents and countercurrents of *Le Spleen de Paris* as retreating "micro-movements" within an overarching, linear "macro-movement."

Much like mourning the passing of a family member, the passage from belief to unbelief involves a psychology in which the ego enters into an ambivalent and prolonged relationship with the "deceased" divine. It is this psychology that drives much of the development in Baudelaire's poetry from a lyricism that took root in Catholic mysticism to a genre of prose that reads largely as a deconstruction of this lyricism. Like mourning, this poetic deconstruction is an undoing that never definitively detaches itself from the lost object that is the enchanted world. As such, the ghosts of the poet's past—lyricism and its metaphysical foundations in the Ideal and in God—are neither entirely absent nor present, but continue to "haunt" the creative process.

Why are the paradoxes of secularization so evident in Baudelaire? The answer lies in large part in the historical moment. The mid-nineteenth century, as Charles Taylor has argued, denotes the time period in which "modern unbelief" truly anchors itself in the social imaginary (369). The broad strokes of secularization that Taylor paints help us to understand Parisian society of Baudelaire's time as traversed by competing discourses or "construals" of belief. Greatly aided by the expansion of print culture, intellectuals, writers, politicians, and even members of the Church engaged in and

encouraged unorthodox reconceptualizations of concepts such as God, the devil, good, and evil. The modernity of Baudelaire's poetry participates in this culture of constantly redefining religious terms, as evidenced by the ingenious title "The Flowers of Evil." What's more, scholarship has substantially underscored the impact on Baudelaire's poetry of historical events such as the expansion of market culture and the 1851 *coup d'état*. Drawing from Walter Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire and the market economy, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theories on capitalism and schizophrenia, Eugene Holland has described Baudelaire as having "lived the early stages of the generalized breakdown of the socio-symbolic order," occasioned by the "return-of-the-despot" (Louis-Napoléon) and by the intensification of capitalism's "market decoding" (265).[4] The political and economic history of mid-nineteenth-century France would have had grave implications for a poet such as Baudelaire, who had espoused the ideals of French republicanism and whose poetry, in its initial stages, was inspired not only by metaphysics, but also by democratic ideologies. In contrast to the early poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, written before the "death of the Republic" (as symbolized by the 1851 plebiscite), and before the intensification of capitalist production under the Second Empire, a later work such as *Le Spleen de Paris* oscillates much more visibly "between the extremes of idealization and cynicism," belief and unbelief (Holland 200).[5]

Baudelaire's choice of esthetic medium further contributes to his emergence as a prominent figure of secularization. The prose poem constitutes a rich intersection of the poetic and the prosaic, which in *Le Spleen de Paris* are associated with the opposing literary visions of idealism and realism. Much scholarship has already established not only the overarching passage in Baudelaire's poetics from idealism to realism, but also a meta-poetics in both his verse and his prose poetry that draws attention to this shift.[6] To stage such an intersection of poetry and prose amounts to a significant questioning of the ideological foundations of verse lyricism. As Jonathan Monroe has argued, the turn toward the realism of prose constitutes an ethical gesture. The genre adopts a more broadly sociopolitical perspective and effects a "democratization" of poetry by drawing attention to the marginalized classes. The narrator of the prose poem becomes an ethical subject that "negates the sublime pretentions" of the lyric (24–29).

In her remarks on the philosophical implications of the prose poem, Barbara Johnson explains that "le passage de la poésie à la prose correspond à une amputation de tout ce qui, dans la poésie, s'érige comme unité, totalité, immortalité, puissance" (154). By its very nature, Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose* erases the ontological claims that lyric poetry makes of an ordered universe neatly structured by good and evil forces, and traversed by "correspondences" of the visible and invisible realms. By extension, we can associate the turn to prose with a loss of faith in God as ultimate signifier. It is necessary to clarify, however, that as Baudelaire chose not the prose of the novel, but rather the deliberately hybrid genre of the prose poem, a work such as *Le Spleen de Paris* is more about an ongoing questioning of faith, and of a reenactment of the loss of faith that is never completely "lost." As Johnson herself clarifies, the prose poem constitutes not so much an erasure as an "interrogation" of correspondences between signifier and signified, between sign and meaning (127). And as Monroe has described it, the prose poem constitutes "a dialogical struggle […] between and among various literary discourses" predicated on opposing philosophical systems (17). In *Le Spleen de Paris*, the juncture of forces underlying two opposing genres and ideologies is imbricated with the elegiac ego's simultaneous yearning for the idealized lost object and recognition of its definitive absence.

Baudelaire's opus shows signs of two types of trajectory. On the "macro" level, a broad linear progression from poetry to prose is linked to Baudelaire's wish to write something original ("singulièrement différent"), as expressed in *Le Spleen de Paris*'s prefatory letter (*OC* 1: 276). With this overarching linearity in mind, close attention should be paid on the "micro" level to a concurrence of opposing forces within individual prose poems, attributable to the tension between idealism and realism. For Baudelaire, this tension is also one between the numinous and the material, the supernatural and the natural.

Irony plays a crucial role in Baudelaire's secularization project. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, the ironic mode is inextricably linked to the question of evil, and ultimately to its secularization. As discussed in Chapter 1, Baudelaire's ethical consideration of the realities of evil and concern for the victims of modernity in the later poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* involve a distanciation from, if not a rejection of, the notion of God. For Baudelaire, irony is crucial both

in the recognition of evil as essentially human ("la conscience dans le Mal") and in constituting a form of "counterviolence" that opposes specific manifestations of evil (*OC* 1: 80). Whereas the voice of irony is present throughout much of Baudelaire's poetry, it is almost absent from the earliest poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and is virtually omnipresent in the late prose poems. The broad observation that I am making here is that there exists a positive correlation between irony and secularity in Baudelaire's writings such that both become increasingly manifest through time. At the level of esthetics (but which has necessary implications for ethics), Holland and Ainslie Armstrong McLees discuss the function of irony in *Les Fleurs du Mal* as undermining the romantic idealism that inspired the poet's earliest poems of the collection. Holland divides Baudelaire's poetry into cycles, the earliest being the romantic/symbolist cycle of poems such as "Correspondances." As part of the turn in Baudelaire's poetry away from a romantic vision of a mystical world based on the integrity of metaphors linking the spiritual and natural realms, a type of irony that Holland labels "metonymic" works to "decode" this romanticism: "Metonymic irony forgoes determinate meaning by undermining the stability of virtual substitution on the metaphoric axis. [This irony] attacks metaphoricity itself, and the poetic symbolism that romantic metaphoricity entails" (58). Correspondingly, McLees regards select poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* as "caricatures of the ideal," of a type of romantic idealism of which Baudelaire's earliest poetic works bear the mark (65, 139).

McLees's and Holland's descriptions of Baudelairean irony as a self-critique of poetic idealism are enhanced by others who explain the moral position that the ironist takes. In his analysis of psychic mobility in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Leo Bersani proffers an equivalence between irony and the psychoanalytic notion of the superego. Through irony, the poet's id transforms into "a superior mental faculty by placing an interdiction on itself" (98). Bersani describes the prose poems as the most thoroughly imbued with this type of superego irony in which the poet remains a mere spectator of his own obsessions. The narrator of *Le Spleen de Paris* is often "present only as an ironic consciousness, [which] is now the fundamental and unquestioned condition of Baudelaire's art" (126). Drawing from Sonya Stephens's study of irony in *Le Spleen de Paris* as the destructuring of established systems of value and

meaning, and Richard Terdiman's consideration of the genre of prose poetry as a form of counterdiscourse to hegemonic, bourgeois discourse, Debarati Sanyal too has emphasized the ethical dimension of Baudelaire's irony by considering it as a challenge to "the violence of modernity" (3). Irony constitutes a type of "critical energy" that teaches us how to "resist historical violence" (4). In essence, Baudelairean irony materializes as a "counterviolence," which Sanyal associates with Foucault and Derrida's notions of "antidogmatic" and "antimetaphysical" violence (29). In wielding the weapon of irony, the narrator of the prose poems opposes "existing violences in the Second Empire's body politic, [especially] the repressive regime of Napoleon III [and] the violence of commerce, consumerism, and the media" (12). As a critical tool that both chips away at the dogmatism of metaphysical, idealist poetry, and targets the evils of Second Empire France, irony serves a specifically secularizing function in the prose poems.

For our purposes, we will consider irony within the related discussion of the dynamics of mourning. As Freud observed, in the act of grieving, the libido is at once impelled toward and away from the lost love object, which had initially been subsumed by the narcissistic ego as a part (or extension) of the self. Baudelaire's prose poems similarly involve a centrifugal movement of ironic distanciation away from as well as a centripetal movement of ongoing obsession with various seemingly former "selves." Baudelairean self-irony works to detach the ever-developing ego from past poet-selves—Baudelaire the romantic, Baudelaire the idealist, Baudelaire the republican, Baudelaire the Catholic—responsible for "object" and "part-object" lyricism in poems such as "Correspondances" and "La Chevelure."[7] As Bersani suggests, Baudelaire's ironic self-conscious narrator maintains both distance from and close proximity to certain images of himself: "he is simultaneously the incomplete (and envious) self, and a superior, moralizing and yet fascinated observer" (133). My aim is to clarify that irony functions as a coping mechanism that works to repel the abiding allure of the lost self-object. This mechanism would be especially important if, psychoanalytically speaking, the elegiac ego feels its sense of coherence threatened by an incessant pull from "former," "other," or "conflicting" selves. From this perspective, we can begin to understand irony as inextricably linked to the process of mourning, which in Baudelaire's poetry of bereavement, involves

grieving the loss not only of mystical lyricism, but also of one's self as lyric poet and as believer.

The first section of this chapter establishes the mystical lyricism of *Les Fleurs du Mal* as one that conflates the Ideal and the notion of God. Section 2 examines some of *Les Fleurs du Mal*'s more radical formulations of good and evil as a reflection of the contemporary crisis in religiously charged political discourse that contributed to the symbolic order's dissolution. The "secularization of evil" in *Le Spleen de Paris* emerges as a project of demystification, born of this dissolution and inextricably linked to the enduring tension between idealism and realism. The third section turns to Freud's theories on mourning to account for secularization's intriguing peculiarities, notably the commingling of nostalgia and irony in the prose pieces. A brief, final section will examine Baudelaire's secularization project alongside the contrary movement of conversion and "resacralization" in Verlaine's poetry in order to begin to consider the theory more fully developed in subsequent chapters that secularization must involve a dialogical relationship with the notion of God if it is to be sustained.

The Mystical Idealism of the Early Baudelaire

The "couronne mystique" that adorns the messiah-poet figure of "Bénédiction," *Les Fleurs du Mal*'s first piece, effectively announces the collection's mystical vision. "Correspondances" serves as a powerful illustration of Baudelaire's mysticism. Its depiction of vertical correspondences between heaven and earth and of horizontal correspondences between the various senses of perception instills a sense of universal harmony and spiritual plenitude. The lyric voice relishes in an intuited, sacred communion of the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural.[8] Often, Baudelaire's mysticism is resolutely Catholic. "Harmonie du soir" reads as a straightforward application of his theory of correspondences to the Catholic Mass. It conveys a sense of spiritual harmony by likening elements of nature to objects of worship, such as the final image in which the brilliant sun impresses the reflection of a monstrance in the poet's mind. Given Baudelaire's rich Catholic upbringing, it is not surprising that he anchored his first published collection in the Catholic tradition.[9] Baudelaire's mysticism is one in which the romantic-symbolist "Ideal" is conflated with notions

of the deity. Most often it is woman who constitutes the divine medium through which the poet catches a glimpse of the infinite. In "Hymne" she pours into the soul of the lyric subject the taste for the *éternel*.[10] Baudelaire's use of the French word *éternel* is significant, for it not only refers to a spiritual realm that defies natural laws of mortality, but also to God himself.[11] Whereas from a biographical perspective, pieces such as "Hymne" can be read as love letters that Baudelaire first addressed to Mme Sabatier, a woman for whom he felt deep admiration and expressed platonic love, such poems also constitute acts of religious adoration in which the feminine muse becomes an abstraction of beauty and goodness. In "Que diras-tu ce soir," the lyric self entreats his heart to sing praises "to the very beautiful, to the very good, to the very dear" (my translation; "à la très belle, à la très bonne, à la très chère"). This list not of nouns but of adjectives denoting intangible qualities suggests that woman is in fact the material idol that permits the poet to contemplate the Good. These spiritual and moral abstractions are inextricably linked to notions of the divine. Not only does the feminine idol possess a "regard divin," in the final stanza the Idol also reveals herself as "l'Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone" (*OC* 1: 43).

Given the Catholic tone of the poet's pursuit of the Ideal, it comes as no surprise that numerous poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* present themselves as genuine prayers addressed to God or his numerous intercessors. Each prayer-poem expresses the speaker's faith in the accessibility of the divine. In "Les Phares," the believer presents, as a burnt offering to God in recognition both of the individual's misery and the deity's grandeur, great works of art from Michelangelo to Da Vinci that depict universal human anguish. The repetition of the anaphora "c'est" that punctuates the poem, as Martine Bercot has rightfully underscored, imitates the repetition of Catholic supplication prayers. The use of the expression "cet ardent sanglot" further adds to the supplicatory tone of the prayer in which the faithful beseech the Lord's pity.[12] As a hymn of praise that lauds God's attributes, the poem also emulates the Catholic hymn of the *Te Deum* to which it makes direct reference: "Ces *Te Deum* sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes" (*OC* 1: 14). According to Laurence Porter, in his article "The Analogic Structure of Baudelaire's 'Les Phares,'" the poem's conclusion defines art itself as "a prayer grounded in human suffering, moti-

vated by melancholy, and aspiring to the spiritual order" (53). Art and prayer become synonymous in their attempt to transcend the material world and to approach the divine as the artists' "ardent sanglot […] vient mourir au bord de [son] éternité" (*OC* 1: 14). Holland describes "Les Phares" as an example of metaphorical poetry, an "overcoding" that establishes correspondences between art and God: "the socio-symbolic metaphoric axis defining art is reinforced by aligning great artists of the Western European tradition in an invocation to the ultimate transcendental Other or master-signifier, God, who grounds the unity of the tradition and the identity of the figures composing it" (127).

In "Réversibilité," another prayer-poem addressed to a female intercessor, the believer expresses a Catholic understanding of human suffering. As scholars have pointed out, the title evokes the Catholic belief in the reversal of merits, founded on the communion of the saints in which the works of charity and the sufferings of believers can profit both those who hurt and others on whose behalf they pray. Inflicted with anguish, hatred, illness, and old age, the lyric voice seeks salvation through communion with an angel whose own sufferings may serve as atonement for his imperfections. In opposing himself to King David, who in his old age sought carnal pleasures in a young woman, the lyric voice seeks not material blessings but rather a spiritual renewal and wishes only for prayers in return. Bercot points out that the comparison between David's physical pursuits and the poet's spiritual aspirations underscores "l'humilité toute spirituelle de la supplique" (8). This reading further reveals Baudelaire's association of the feminized, poetic ideal with the divine. The Catholicism of "Réversibilité" lies largely in its depiction of agony as ultimately serving the Good. Not only does the poet seek the intercession of an innocent, saintly figure whose misfortunes may grant him spiritual atonement, the prayer-poem also constitutes an act of suffering in which the poet prolongs through enumeration ("L'angoisse, la honte, les remords, les sanglots, les ennuis") the nature of the torments that he himself endures (*OC* 1: 44).[13] Originally a poem-letter addressed to Mme Sabatier, "Réversibilité" strongly suggests that the poet interpreted his afflictions and sublimated his desires through Catholic tenets. Not unlike "Réversibilité," the divinely appointed poet of "Bénédiction" adopts a Catholic perspective of suffering as a gift from the Father, as atonement for his sins

("Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance / Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés"; *OC* 1: 9). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the poet's resort to Catholic theology as an instinctual coping mechanism endows with great significance any number of personal hardships (monetary, familial, etc.).

By addressing supernatural figures, the eulogic self expresses the emotional need for—if not faith in—communication with a spiritual realm. The prayer-poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* testify not only to the enduring assumption of vertical correspondences and spiritual transcendence, but also to an emotional investment in religious figures. This is perhaps most evident in "À une Madone," in which the self expresses ambivalent feelings of adoration and contempt for the mistress by confusing her with the Virgin Mary. As its subtitle "Ex-voto" indicates, the poem constitutes a prayer of thanksgiving, in which the self expresses his desire to build for the Virgin an ornate altar. However, the prayer transforms into an act of deicide in which the poet describes his intent, driven by jealousy and hatred, to stab the Virgin's heart with seven sharpened knives. This channeling of intense feelings of desire, jealousy, and hatred toward the Virgin Mary vividly illustrates the visceral nature of the poet's religious sentiment, however irreverent Catholic readers of the time may have interpreted it.

In his journal *Mon cœur mis à nu*, Baudelaire avowed his penchant for the mystical and for God: "Dès mon enfance, tendance à la mysticité. Mes conversations avec Dieu" (*OC* 1: 706). The choice of preposition, in this case "dès," infers that the poet continued to be attracted to mysticism well into adulthood. The early period of mystical Catholicism in Baudelaire serves as a crucial starting point for outlining a secularization of poetry that constitutes precisely a marked distanciation from the metaphysical.

Evil and Secularization

In Baudelaire's early poems, evil is highly inflected with Catholic imagery and theology, especially in the effigy of the devil. As God's competitor for the human soul, Satan is relentless in his attempts to lure the lyric voice away from the divine. Such is the drama of "La Destruction," in which a "Démon" brushes up against the poet's very body, and descends into his lungs through the air that he breathes (*OC* 1: 111). To seduce the poet, this

demonic figure acquires the form of a beautiful woman to distract him from the sight of God and to entice him into destructive acts.[14] In "Tout entière," the "Démon" similarly tempts the lyrical self to forsake the Ideal. This time, the *je* appears to play the role of Jesus in resisting the devil's temptations. Instead of yielding, he takes relish in mystical plenitude: "Ô métamorphose mystique / De tous mes sens fondus en un! / Son haleine fait la musique, / Comme sa voix fait le parfum!" (*OC* 1: 42). Caught in the cosmic battle of good and evil forces, the poet-sinner pours out his soul in praise to the divine despite his attraction to worldly pleasures. If the believer suffers in his aspirations toward the Good, it is for the betterment of fallen humanity. In suffering, the poet's spirit is molded to sing God's praises.

In other poems, Baudelaire's depiction of God and Satan, good and evil, is decidedly less orthodox. "Au lecteur" presents evil as the individual's irresistible response to chronic *ennui*. It becomes an invigorating force that awakens the poet's dulled sensibilities.[15] The resort to cruelty in the affirmation of life is perhaps most vividly enacted in "L'Héautontimorouménos" in which the *je* delights in playing the role of both victim and torturer in the violent relationship with his lover. The poem's sadomasochism can be better understood in light of Baudelaire's candid remarks in his *Journaux intimes* on the pleasure that he feels in committing evil acts: "Moi, je dis: la volupté unique et suprême de l'amour gît dans la certitude de faire le *mal*. —Et l'homme et la femme savent de naissance que dans le mal se trouve toute volupté" (*OC* 1: 652).[16]

As discussed in Chapter 1, an originality of Baudelaire's thought is his rapprochement of evil with life itself. An extension of this thesis is Baudelaire's equation of Evil with the beautiful. In an unpublished preface, Baudelaire explains that the collection's premise is founded on his desire to extract beauty from evil ("extraire la *beauté* du Mal"; *OC* 1: 181).[17] As Fondane has already observed, Baudelaire's lyric poetry contradicts an entire tradition in Western philosophy (although not necessarily Catholic theology) that understands evil as a reduction of the Good. For Baudelaire, evil is affirmation and positivity, and appears as an exterior force that the individual constantly confronts (*OC* 1: 194). One could say that evil constitutes the undeniable truth of existence. It is Baudelaire's insistence on the reality of evil that remains a constant throughout his life works, even after he adopts a resolutely secular

vision of humankind. In *Les Fleurs du Mal* the saintly intentions expressed in the more Catholic poems become overshadowed by others in which evil forces gain the upper hand.

This does not, however, paint a complete picture of the religious thought and sentiment expressed in the collection. There is, in fact, a variety of depictions of good and evil that cannot be attributed to Catholic theology, or to an unorthodox conflation of evil with Being. To account for the plurality of religious and para-religious thought in *Les Fleurs*, I would like briefly to consider a crisis in religious discourse that occurred in mid-nineteenth-century France, and that consisted of a general "decoding" of the symbolic order (to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's term from *Anti-Œdipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*). Since at least the Enlightenment, the Church's interpretation of the individual's place in the universe had come under significant attack. By the 1840s, the cumulative effect of these blows was clearly felt. As the country was weighing the pros and cons of monarchical and republican forms of government, multiple alternative, religiously charged discourses, linked to oppositional political positions vying for power, crystallized and began to circulate quite freely in French society. This was due, in large part, to the intermittent periods of *liberté de la presse* under Louis-Philippe and the Second Republic, as well as to the development of newspaper printing methods that ensured rapid and cost-effective dissemination of political platforms.[18] Political debates featured in the press painted a Manichean universe in which activists from all sides spoke of a public realm, divided between "good" and "evil" ideologies. Readers not only of Parisian newspapers but also of politically oriented philosophical and literary works bore witness to the proliferation of conflicting voices that defined on different terms the nature of good, evil, and true Christian belief. The political groups' need to distinguish themselves from opponents occasioned the massive propagation of varying definitions of good and evil. This involved a lengthy engagement in demonic vilification, especially between rival newspapers, in which political factions presented their opponents as the devil's servants. Ultimately, these debates centered on the question, what or who was evil.

The principal groups that participated in these debates were conservative Catholics and Church leaders, the emerging socialist or "démoc-soc" movement, Social Catholics, independent

socialist thinkers, and romantic writers. As documented by historians such as Ross Collins and Edward Berenson, and literary scholars including Eugen Weber, Max Milner, and Richard Burton, all five groups employed a highly religious vocabulary in their political and literary texts, but repeatedly demonstrated the need to clarify the language that they used. Conservative Catholics, interested in maintaining the alliance between altar and throne, associated Christianity with tradition and the ruling regime's authority, and evil with rebellion and irreverent socialists. Conservative spokesmen, including Charles de Montalembert, Adolphe Thiers, and Louis Veuillot, vehemently voiced disapproval of socialism and advocated respect for the governing authority in reactionary newspapers such as *L'Univers* and *Ami de la religion*, asserting that "society has need of slaves," that "work is a punishment," and that it was necessary to return to the religious doctrine of "forbear and respect" (Collins 133). In Manichean fashion, they repeatedly asserted their position as Christian, and denigrated socialism as the devil's work. Leaders of the Catholic majority, including Montalembert, habitually described the political dynamics of the time as a struggle between the forces of good (Catholicism) and evil (Revolution), and described socialism as a disease responsible for the evils plaguing French society.[19]

Quite conversely, socialists, and to a lesser extent, social Catholics, would claim that Christian principles demanded revolt against the oppressive ruling class, and regarded evil as the work not of revolutionaries but of kings. As documented by Berenson in his study of left-wing politics in mid-nineteenth-century France, the highly influential démoc-soc movement, led by intellectuals and politicians such as Victor Considerant, Pierre Leroux, and Étienne Cabet, often appropriated Christian values and symbols to oppose the ruling regime and legitimate socialist ideas.[20] Accordingly, the movement proclaimed the Gospels as the first socialist manifesto to advocate the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Collins 134, 142). A minority of Catholic leaders, a group of clerics constituting the core of the Social Catholic movement, joined the campaign. Félicité de Lamennais was perhaps the most vocal in authoring pamphlets that presented the Gospels as the foundational texts of social reform.[21] Many delivered sermons with a socialist agenda (Collins 27, 85).[22] To attract voters, the socialists and social Catholics also undertook a fair amount of

negative campaigning. The démoc-socs, in particular, did not hesitate to proclaim that "Catholicism was its enemy" (Berenson 144). They affirmed the sincerity and truth of their own faith in contrast to the discourse of a corrupt Church uninterested in social change: "Our reverence for Christianity […] is equaled only by our disdain and fear of Catholicism—that self-serving and degrading plague of our society" (Berenson 100). In their appropriation of religious discourse, the group attributed new meanings and symbols to good and evil.

The prolific socialist theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon launched his own attack on the Church. Although Proudhon too deployed religious terms and Manichean language, his position was much more radical. By claiming that Christ's earthly mission provided no relief for the poor, Proudhon attacked the Christian belief that Jesus was Savior.[23] He even went so far as to equate God with evil ("Dieu, c'est le mal"), holding him responsible for the sufferings of humanity.[24] Yet, Proudhon did not abandon religious rhetoric for a secular idiom. Rather, he exalted Satan by figuring him as a symbol of good, "a protector of a humble, persecuted mankind."[25] Eugen Weber and Max Milner point out in their studies on French romanticism that writers too inverted the meaning of Catholic symbols in their social commentaries. Alfred de Vigny, Leconte de Lisle, and George Sand provided sympathetic portrayals of Satan as an outcast figure.[26] These authors, whose convictions were more revolutionary than Catholic, saw Satan not as a religious figure of evil, but as a political symbol of liberty in opposition to the repressive monarchy of divine right.[27]

At the risk of casting *Les Fleurs*'s unorthodox religiosity more as a reflection of the times than as a unique understanding of religious notions, I propose that the proliferation of discourses that marked mid-nineteenth-century French politics fueled a variety of conflicting portrayals of evil in the collection. For example, evil appears as a polyvalent signifier in the prefatory poem "Au lecteur," in which the satanic figure of Ennui symbolizes two opposing political camps. In the poem, Ennui threatens to make shambles of the earth, even to swallow it in a yawn. His eye fills with an involuntary tear as he dreams of gallows while puffing at his hookah. In *The Writing of Melancholy*, Ross Chambers has already discussed the dual signification of the figure. How readers of the time interpreted Ennui, he argues, depended on their political sensibilities,

and whether they could "read between the lines" (7).[28] On the one hand, the figure could be interpreted as the political and social oppressors of the Second Empire, "the social tyranny exerted […] by a victorious bourgeoisie whose boredom-producing order rested […] on the bloody repressions of the working classes" (122). In this case, Ennui's involuntary tear and dreaming of the gallows would signify the boredom-producing, oppressive regime. But in a type of duplicitous writing on Baudelaire's part, Ennui may also symbolize, quite conversely, a call to revolt by the working classes against their rulers. Accordingly, the involuntary tear would betray the surfacing of violent urges of revolt, and the dreaming of gallows would call to mind the revolutionary violence of *La Terreur*. In sum, Ennui could represent *either* an authoritarian figure who exerts violence in order to repress revolution *or* quite conversely, the "no less bloody revenge of the people against their oppressors" (122).

Chambers relates Ennui's satanic characteristics with the figure's personification of political despotism. He cites anthropologist Michael Taussig who shows that historically, when confronted with an oppressive bourgeois economy, the working classes have considered themselves subjugated to the devil's reign. However, we can go one step further by associating Satan with Ennui's other face as well. As we have seen, Satan emerged in French romanticism as a revolutionary figure, as a friend of the oppressed classes. Satan's duplicitous nature in contemporary political discourse enhances Chambers's thesis of Ennui's dual signification, and informs our understanding of evil in *Les Fleurs*. If Baudelaire chose to feature Satan as the primary symbol of duplicity that serves as the vehicle for two opposing discourses, it is because in mid-nineteenth-century France the religious figure was already duplicitous in inspiring opposing characterizations. In this case, Satan is both a representative of the incumbent tyrant and of the oppressed revolutionary, as the socialists and the conservative Catholics respectively argued. To be sure, Baudelaire was very much a poet of his times in the sense that the inconsistencies in his poetic imagery reflected the contemporary destabilization of discourse on religion and politics, due to society's own experimentation in new ideologies and forms of government. The multiplicity of definitions of evil and other concepts in contemporary political and religious discourse, and expanded on in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, provided for the poet what I

would call a perfect storm—an explosion or surfeit of meaning—out of which irony, or a marked distance from religious discourse, would gradually emerge.

In "Bénédiction," God himself embodies opposing political ideologies. In doing so, the poem also juxtaposes two contemporary understandings of human suffering. After establishing the poet as a messianic figure, the poem inverts the traditional signification of the Annunciation, as depicted in the Gospels. Instead of feeling blessed by God for her motherhood, as the *Ave Maria* proclaims, Baudelaire's Virgin considers her pregnancy a curse:

> Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères
> Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation!
>
> Puisque tu m'as choisie entre toutes les femmes
> Pour être le dégoût de mon triste mari. (*OC* 1: 7)

Echoing Proudhon's proclamation that "Dieu, c'est le mal," the Virgin figure attributes evil to a cruel God, whom she blames for her sufferings: "Je ferai rejaillir ta haine qui m'accable / Sur l'instrument maudit de tes méchancetés" (*OC* 1: 7). In sharp contrast, the anointed poet praises God for his goodness, albeit a goodness rooted ironically in his "gifts" of suffering that he bestows upon humanity ("Soyez béni mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance / Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés"; *OC* 1: 9). In expressing belief in a good but severe God, the anointed poet's faith resembles that of the conservative Catholics who claimed that "society has need of slaves," that "work is a punishment," and that Christianity demands "forbear[ance] and respect." Like "Au lecteur," "Bénédiction" reflects the historical crisis in religious discourse, in which theological concepts were dislodged from their traditional position in the Catholic universe and acquired the versatility to signify opposing ideas.

"Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" offers one more example of a poem that features opposing political interpretations of religious themes, and conflicting characterizations of spiritual figures. In *Baudelaire and the Second Republic*, Richard Burton marshals a compelling argument that in the years leading to the 1851 *coup d'état*, Baudelaire was committed to the Republican cause and was highly influenced by socialist thinkers and an evolving republican-socialist brand of Christianity. Poems that Baudelaire composed in

this period, namely, those of the "Révolte" section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, convey a number of politically inflected images of good and evil. Burton argues that "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre," published just subsequent to the coup, interprets the birth, development, and death of the Second Republic through the allegory of the final days of Jesus's life, from his triumphant entry into the Holy City on the back of an ass to his surrender and crucifixion. In the démoc-soc image of the Republic as Christ, Jesus is cast as a revolutionary who inspired the poet's own call to arms in hopes of saving democracy. Unlike the Christ of the Gospels, who dissuades Peter from taking up the sword, in "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" Jesus incites revolutionary violence: "Puissé-je user du glaive et périr par le glaive!" (*OC* 1: 122). However, the poem's final line surprises the reader by turning against the Christ-Republic in praise of Saint Peter for having denied Jesus. Burton attributes this sudden twist to Baudelaire's disillusionment with the Christ-Republic that failed to fight for its survival. In the aftermath of the plebiscite in which the nation voiced her approval of the coup, as Burton argues, Baudelaire flirted with anarchist extremist sentiment, which the poem's conclusion expresses.[29]

Conflicting interpretations of good and evil in *Les Fleurs du Mal* owe much to competing ideologies in Baudelaire's own thought, such as his Catholic upbringing and the development of his political leanings from republicanism to anarchism to disillusionment. It is logical to conjecture that the impassioned, religiously charged political discourse of the time resonated with the poet's spiritual sensibility and provided a rich source of inspiration for his developing poetic vision. Above all, our consideration of passages from *Les Fleurs* helps us to imagine a collapse of the symbolic order in mid-nineteenth-century France that Baudelaire's poetry both reflected and collaborated in. Holland's description of the consequences of the market economy's "decoding" effects can certainly be attributed to the political upheaval of the time:

> Once a critical threshold of decoding has been crossed, as it is in the case of Baudelaire, the system of codes (or "symbolic order") comprising a culture implodes, and the binary oppositions that once structured and sustained it no longer hold: good and evil, base and noble, nature and culture, man and woman, sacred and profane—all lose their stability and float freely, subject to dizzying reversals and perverse appropriations. (15–16)

As the symbolic order began to lose its integrity, ultimately meaning itself was placed into question, as forcefully enacted in the later lyric poems of "Le Masque" and "Le Cygne." That which was once understood as truth is revealed to be a mere appearance or "mask." No longer a conveyor of a fixed idea, the "Sign" is doomed to wander in permanent exile. The fall of the symbolic order, perceived as a flattening of the universe, leads to the claustrophobic "Spleen" poems' melancholic ego who suffers from an existential "heaviness" as his physical surroundings and consciousness itself acquire oppressive weight.

In *Le Spleen de Paris*, decoding entails the demystification of religious figures, symbols, and themes. This is especially the case with evil, which becomes divested of its mystical aura even as it remains a dominant theme. In the prefatory poem addressed to his editor, the poet likens the collection's structure to the body of a serpent, a metaphor both of each poem-segment's independence and of the collection's integrity. The editor may choose to cut the "snake" in various places, eliminate or rearrange the segments, and find that the body will rejoin (*OC* 1: 275). However, the snake is an unlikely metaphor if this textual flexibility is all that Baudelaire wanted to convey. It is difficult for a reader familiar with the serpent's role in *Les Fleurs du Mal* not to recall the snake's traditional function as a symbol of evil. Furthermore, the snake appears unequivocally as a symbol of evil in the prose poem "Les Tentations." As if pursuing his thoughts on the serpent metaphor, Baudelaire proposes in his personal comments on *Le Spleen de Paris* a series of numerical titles—*66*, *666*, and *6666*—that link the total number of poems or pages to the underlying thematic of evil (*OC* 1: 365). In *Le Spleen de Paris*, the serpent metaphor reflects both the structure and theme of the collection. Within the various poem-segments, evil becomes manifest in several, independent contexts. The theme winds its way, tortuously, throughout the segments of the "serpentine" body of poems. The underlying logic may be that evil issues from the various social settings of the modern city, which provides the poems' context.

"Les Tentations: Ou Éros, Plutus et la Gloire" is one of the only prose poems that abounds in traditional devil imagery. And yet, I propose that the poem effects a process of secularization that works to divest the notion of evil of its religious symbolism. In "secularizing" evil, the piece also rejects romantic idealism. "Les

Tentations" reads as a parody of Christ's temptation in the desert. In this case, three devils appear to the narrator in a dream: two Satans and a she-devil ("diablesse"). The first apparition—Éros—is dressed with all the markings of the devil. Notably, he wears as a belt "un serpent chatoyant" whose head is raised and eyes ablaze (*OC* 1: 308). From this devilish accoutrement hang vials filled with sinister liquors and, in a satanic mimicry of Christ, are labeled with the commandment "Buvez, ceci est mon sang" (*OC* 1: 308). But this apparition also possesses a peculiar beauty that the narrator keenly observes. Notably, the devil's lips opened up to incense burners "d'où s'exhalait la bonne odeur d'une parfumerie; et à chaque fois qu'il soupirait, des insectes musqués s'illuminaient, en voletant, aux ardeurs de son souffle" (*OC* 1: 308). This devil offers to empower the narrator as the lord of souls and the master of living matter, much like the sculptor who masters the clay. In fact, he tempts the narrator with the pleasure of leaving his body and losing himself in others. However, the narrator quickly rejects Satan's offers, claiming that he has no such desires.[30] What the devilish specter in fact offers is a great artistic faculty that resembles the esthetics of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The sweet and musky odors that emanate from the devil's mouth evoke the perfumes that gave shape to the mystic poetics of "Correspondances," "Parfum exotique," "Le parfum," "Harmonie du soir," "Le flacon," and many others. The promise to endow the narrator with the ability to lose himself in others alludes to another aspect of Baudelaire's esthetics. As he recounts in the prose poem "Les Foules," the narrator takes great pleasure in mixing with crowds as a means of escaping the existential angst of *tedium vitae*. In "Les Tentations," the narrator's rejection of the devil's offer of a poetic genius not grounded in reality follows the ethical imperative underlying *Les Paradis artificiels* (as discussed in Chapter 1) and constitutes the line of thought that governs many of the prose poems.

While the first apparition represents the abiding tension in *Le Spleen de Paris* between idealism and realism, with the second and third apparitions traditional evil figures slowly give way to a more sociological perspective of evil. The description of the second Satan—Plutus—deserves to be quoted at length:

> Le second Satan […] était un homme vaste, à gros visage sans yeux, dont la lourde bedaine surplombait les cuisses, et dont toute la peau était dorée et illustrée, comme d'un tatouage, d'une

> foule de petites figures mouvantes représentant les formes nombreuses de la misère universelle. Il y avait de petits hommes efflanqués qui se suspendaient volontairement à un clou; il y avait de petits gnomes difformes, maigres, dont les yeux suppliants réclamaient l'aumône mieux encore que leurs mains tremblantes; et puis de vieilles mères portant des avortons accrochés à leurs mamelles exténuées. Il y en avait encore bien d'autres.
>
> Le gros Satan tapait avec son poing sur son immense ventre, d'où sortait alors un long et retentissant cliquetis de métal, qui se terminait en un vague gémissement fait de nombreuses voix humaines. Et il riait, en montrant impudemment ses dents gâtées, d'un énorme rire imbécile, comme certains hommes de tous les pays quand ils ont trop bien dîné. (*OC* 1: 309)

Unlike the first Satan, which preserves a supernatural likeness, this devil's description is almost immediately subsumed by a realist depiction of human misery, notably hunger and poverty, tattooed on his body. This distinctly organic avatar of Satan possesses the fleshy features of an obese human figure. His potbelly, round face, and rotted teeth sharply contrast with the emaciated bodies of men, women, and children. Sonya Stephens identifies the description of the second Satan as a harsh assessment of the bourgeoisie. In her research she has found that nineteenth-century iconography commonly depicted the ruling class as gluttonous: "In contrast to Éros, Plutus appears in a more earthly form, the representative over-fed bourgeois fixed by nineteenth-century iconography" (135). This socio-economic critique should be understood as targeting Second Empire politics, a bourgeois regime known for its dispossession of the poor.[31] It comes as no surprise that when the devil offers the world's riches, the narrator turns his head in disgust.

The narrator first perceives the final apparition—Fame—as a diabolic beauty whose charm resembles the *femmes fatales* of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. She tempts the narrator with celebrity by boldly resounding his name through the blowing of a gigantic trumpet wrapped in the world's newspapers. However, as the narrator begins to focus his gaze, the figure slowly loses her mystical appearance:

> Quant à la Diablesse, je mentirais si je n'avouais pas qu'à première vue je lui trouvai un bizarre charme. Pour définir ce charme, je ne saurais le comparer à rien de mieux qu'à celui des

> très belles femmes sur le retour, qui cependant ne vieillissent plus, et dont la beauté garde la magie pénétrante des ruines. Elle avait l'air à la fois impérieux et dégingandé, et ses yeux, quoique battus, contenaient une force fascinatrice. Ce qui me frappa le plus, ce fut le mystère de sa voix, dans laquelle je retrouvais le souvenir des *contralti* les plus délicieux et aussi un peu de l'enrouement des gosiers incessamment lavés par l'eau-de-vie.
>
> "Veux-tu connaître ma puissance?" dit la fausse déesse avec sa voix charmante et paradoxale. "Ecoute."
>
> Et elle emboucha alors une gigantesque trompette, enrubannée, comme un mirliton, des titres de tous les journaux de l'univers, et à travers cette trompette elle cria mon nom, qui roula ainsi à travers l'espace avec le bruit de cent mille tonnerres, et me revint répercuté par l'écho de la plus lointaine planète.
>
> "Diable!" fis-je, à moité subjugué, "voilà qui est précieux!" Mais en examinant plus attentivement la séduisante virago, il me sembla vaguement que je la reconnaissais pour l'avoir vue trinquant avec quelques drôles de ma connaissance; et le son rauque du cuivre apporta à mes oreilles je ne sais quel souvenir d'une trompette prostituée.
>
> Aussi, je répondis, avec tout mon dédain: "Va-t'en! Je ne suis pas fait pour épouser la maîtresse de certains que je ne veux pas nommer." (*OC* 1: 309–10)

In this rich passage, a seductive being of mystery and magic is finally revealed to be a neighborhood drunkard and prostitute. The passage elaborates a demystification in which the image of a supernatural beauty is repeatedly subverted by a number of curious attributes. Her operatic voice "full of mystery," which initially bewitches the narrator, begins to emit a husky, "paradoxical" tone, and is compared to a drinker of brandy. Her penetrating, magical beauty ("magie pénétrante") is undermined by her awkward manner ("l'air dégingandé"), and her hypnotic eyes ("ses yeux conten[ant] une force fascinatrice") are somewhat spoiled by their weary gaze ("yeux battus"). Finally, the "precious," "subjugating" sound of the specter's instrument transforms into the hoarse echo of a "prostituted trumpet."

The first section of the poem, as we have observed, moves to reject a type of metaphysical poetry not grounded in the realities of daily living. The second and third sections proceed to secularize poetry through evil's demystification, in which metaphysical,

devilish figures are shaped into material, even human, form. The question of evil is specifically placed in the socio-political context of mid-nineteenth-century France. That is to say, a Catholic interpretation of evil as originating from a destructive supernatural force cedes to a commentary on class oppression and the depiction of social ills such as drinking and prostitution.

The poem's final stanzas present a stark shift in tone. Upon awakening, the narrator regrets having declined the gifts of his diabolic visitors. In fact, he implores their pardon in prayer, and beseeches their return:

> Certes, d'une si courageuse abnégation j'avais le droit d'être fier. Mais malheureusement je me réveillai, et toute ma force m'abandonna. "En vérité, me dis-je, il fallait que je fusse bien lourdement assoupi pour montrer de tels scrupules. Ah! s'ils pouvaient revenir pendant que je suis éveillé, je ne ferais pas tant le délicat!"
>
> Et je les invoquai à haute voix, les suppliant de me pardonner, leur offrant de me déshonorer aussi souvent qu'il le faudrait pour mériter leurs faveurs; mais je les avais sans doute fortement offensés, car ils ne sont jamais revenus. (*OC* 1: 310)

It would be difficult not to interpret this conclusion—and more specifically the narrator's lament over having left his dream state ("Mais malheureusement je me réveillai")—as an expression of regret. Indeed, in mourning the dissolution of the mystical realm of his dreams, he also regrets the metaphysical lyricism of his earlier poetry.[32] In the following section, I will look at a number of prose poems that, like "Les Tentations," proceed to reject a poetics predicated on romantic mysticism. However, this rejection is typically accompanied by a psychic backlash in which the self remains emotionally attached to that which it is otherwise impelled to relinquish. Whereas in the final paragraph of "Les Tentations" it appears that much time has passed since the narrator had the dream, he continues to grieve over its dissolution in the present. He explains to the reader that since his dream, the tempters have never returned ("ne sont jamais revenus"). As discussed in the next section, it is within the Freudian paradigm of mourning's paradoxical nature as a prolonged period of movement both toward and away from a lost object that we can begin to understand the complex process of secularization.

While I interpret the conclusion of "Les Tentations" as an act of mourning for that which is lost, it also contains elements of irony. For instance, the text appears to cast dreams as quite the opposite of what we would expect by proleptically challenging the Freudian notion of dreams as wish fulfillments. In essence, the narrator relegates the domain of the superego to the subconscious by explaining that if he "displayed such scruples" in resisting the temptations of the devil, it is because he must have fallen into a deep sleep. In his waking state the narrator paradoxically loses his inhibitions ("toute ma force m'abandonna") by seeking to fulfill his underlying desires. The final paragraph, which reads as a prayer, is equally unexpected. It must be asked whether the narrator intends his invocation of the devilish specters as a genuine prayer. Does he truly expect them to reappear and grant his wishes, or is the "prayer" meant to underscore precisely the opposite—that is to say, the futility of such wishful thinking? In the following section, I will consider the possibility that irony in the prose poems becomes manifest as heightened self-consciousness in seeking to mitigate through self-distanciation the ego's otherwise unrelenting obsession with the lost object—in this case, the mystical realm of romantic lyricism.

To better perceive the pattern in the prose poems of concomitant attraction to and away from the lost object, it would be helpful to place "Les Tentations" alongside "Le Joueur généreux," to which it bears striking resemblance. In this poem, the narrator is accosted by Satan himself, although this devil is entirely of human form. He invites the narrator to accompany him to a beautiful, underground dwelling where they gamble while enjoying food, drink, and engaging conversation. Notably, they poke fun at popular Enlightenment notions, including the idea that the devil doesn't exist. Eventually, this devilish figure promises the narrator the fulfillment of his every desire:

> Jamais un désir ne sera formé par vous, que je ne vous aide à le réaliser; vous régnerez sur vos vulgaires semblables; vous serez fourni de flatteries et même d'adorations; l'argent, l'or, les diamants, les palais féeriques viendront vous chercher et vous prieront de les accepter, sans que vous ayez fait un effort pour les gagner; vous changerez de patrie et de contrée aussi souvent que votre fantaisie vous l'ordonnera; vous vous soûlerez de voluptés, sans lassitude, dans des pays charmants où il

> fait toujours chaud et où les femmes sentent aussi bon que les fleurs. (*OC* 1: 327–28)

However, once the narrator has returned home, he feels his faith in the devil dissolve. In an act of desperation, he asks God to make the devil keep his promises:

> Mais peu à peu, après que je l'eus quitté, l'incurable défiance rentra dans mon sein; je n'osais plus croire à un si prodigieux bonheur, et, en me couchant, faisant encore ma prière par un reste d'habitude imbécile, je répétais dans un demi-sommeil: "Mon Dieu! Seigneur, mon Dieu! faites que le diable me tienne sa parole!" (*OC* 1: 328)

This final passage is revealing on many levels. First, while the body of the poem seems boldly to affirm the devil's existence, the narrator's entire experience is undermined in the conclusion by a loss of faith that sets in. It is as if the narrator had dreamed the whole encounter. Because of the narrator's seemingly nascent skepticism, the magical underground realm, including the enticing powers of the devil, begins to dissolve. Stephens points out the ambivalent nature of this loss of faith, in which the narrator is unable to "put trust in the Devil, in the satanic illusion […] despite his overwhelming desire" (139).[33] What's especially interesting is that the narrator interprets his move to prayer as a vestige of an earlier mindset ("un reste d'habitude imbécile"), as if it constituted the instinctual reflex of a believer that he has ceased to be. The use of the qualifier "imbécile" serves as an instance of self-distanciation in which the narrator ridicules his own behavior. As in "Les Tentations," the narrator of "Le Joueur généreux" experiences both a movement away from his childhood faith and an enduring attachment to it.

The concluding prayer is unequivocally ironic not only because it constitutes a cynic's prayer—the narrator describes his resort to prayer as "an idiotic habit"—but also because he is invoking God's help in assuring the devil's promises.[34] In both prose poems, irony undercuts the ego's otherwise lasting emotional investment in the mystical. Through the effects of self-distanciation, irony presents itself as a coping mechanism to assuage the persisting attraction of the lost enchanted world.

Le Spleen de Paris: Secularization and Mourning

"Perte d'auréole" boldly reenacts the experience of loss within the broader discussion of the secularization of poetry. The poem's title, translated in English as "Loss of Halo," heralds the loss of religiosity at the heart of *Le Spleen de Paris*.[35] As the narrator-poet rushes to cross a busy, muddy street of Paris, his halo slips off his head and into "la fange du macadam" (*OC* 1: 352). Faced with the dangers of on-coming traffic, the poet abandons his halo and hurries to the other side of the street. He subsequently relishes the idea that some "bad poet" will find his halo and insolently wear it. In "Perte d'auréole," poetry and religion are simultaneously evoked in the image of the poet wearing a halo. In comparison with the lyric poem "Bénédiction," in which the poet's "couronne mystique" symbolizes divine calling, the loss of the halo to the city streets constitutes nothing less than a metaphor for the prose collection's secular nature, predicated on loss (*OC* 1: 9).

The dearth of religious vocabulary in *Le Spleen de Paris*, especially in comparison to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, coupled with the realistic backdrop of the modern city, constitutes a shift from the metaphysical to the material, and from the ideal to the real. In his analysis of "Perte d'auréole," Edward Kaplan speaks of a genuine "conversion," which we would specify as a "secular conversion." As Kaplan explains, the poet's "incognito" and "defrocked" persona pulls him out of the realm of the Ideal and "insinuates him into the present moment" of Second Empire Paris and the capital's Haussmannized boulevards (142–44). Murphy's reading of the poem notes that the poet, in fixing his eyes on the horses and carriages of the muddy street, loses sight of heaven. He contrasts the poem's turn away from celestial visions with the poet's focus on the splendid throne of God in "Bénédiction." Murphy aptly describes "Perte d'auréole" as a peculiar poem of secularization ("laïcisation"), which he links to the concomitant demise of lyrical, romantic poetry, and the advent of a modern poetry born of the industrial age (181–94). This distinction between Baudelaire's lyric and prose poetry also falls in line with Barbara Johnson's thesis that the prose poems constitute a demystification of lyrical idealism. Indeed, in "Perte d'auréole," the poet's association of the halo with bad poetry—he imagines "quelque mauvais poète" retrieving and adorning himself with the halo—offers an allegory

of Baudelaire's move from lyricism to prose, dramatized in terms of loss.

The repetition in *Le Spleen de Paris* of the loss of love objects mimics mourning's repetitive nature. When considered together, the various prose poems read as a traumatic writing that relives time and again the ego's relinquishing of an object-cathexis. It does not matter the order in which one reads the poems—as Baudelaire himself prefaced—since each is a version of the same story of loss. There appears to be no progression as the ego is caught in the endless work of mourning. The vanishing of the feminized "Idole" in "La Chambre double," the departure of the enchanting devils in "Les Tentations" and "Le Joueur généreux," the disillusionment of maternal love in "La Corde," the eclipse of God in "Les Vocations," and the relinquishing of poetic idealism at the heart of "Perte d'auréole," "Laquelle est la vraie?," and "Déjà!," reenact the psychological experience of loss and perform the ongoing work of grieving.

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud defined mourning as the reaction to the loss of either a loved person or an abstraction such as country, liberty, or God (243). He observed that the psyche does not readily abandon the love object, but relinquishes it only "bit by bit." This slow process is executed "at great expense of time and cathectic energy," and despite the beckoning of a new object-cathexis (244–45). Accordingly, in mourning, "the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged" (245). A paradox of the writing of loss is that the object is not psychically lost but is in fact "hypercathected." Freud describes mourning as a type of "hyperremembering," which Tammy Clewell summarizes as a "magical restoration":

> A process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replac[es] an actual absence with an imaginary presence. This magical restoration of the lost object enables the mourner to assess the value of the relationship and comprehend what he or she has lost in losing the other. (44)

Part of my aim here is to explore the libido's enduring investment in *Le Spleen de Paris* as a type of "magical restoration" that adds to the complexities of secularization.

To understand the work of mourning in Baudelaire, we must also discuss the related psychological condition of narcissism. For Freud, our libidinal investment in objects is essentially narcissistic. The self-love that characterizes the earliest stages of the infant's psychic development eventually transforms into object-love. In redirecting its libido outward, the ego proceeds to construct a self-image conditioned by an outside world of others and objects.[36] In short, despite this transformation from self- to object-love, narcissism continues to dominate the ego's relationship to objects. Freud posits "an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexes much as the body of an amoeba is related to the pseudopodia that it puts out" (Clewell 76). As Freud further explains, "[Object-love] displays the marked sexual overvaluation which is doubtless derived from the child's original narcissism and thus corresponds to a transference of that narcissism to the sexual object" (Clewell 88). Freud would eventually come to understand self-identity as inextricably involved in the ego's choice of and ongoing libidinal investment in objects, even once they are no longer physically present. Through introjection, that is to say by identifying with the lost object, by "internalizing" it, the ego is able to give it up (for the sake of "moving on"). In his later essay on "The Ego and the Id," Freud asserts that "the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices" (29). Freud's understanding of the self's relationship to objects assists us in approaching the heterogeneity of Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, that is to say, the collection's chronic shifts in tone and perspective, as the collection's positing of multiple poetic subjects that vary according to their object choice.[37]

In light of Freud's discussion of identity formation through object-choice, scholars' attribution of the discursive contrasts and narrator personae in *Le Spleen de Paris* to the fragmentation of the poetic personality are psychoanalytically justified. A piece such as "Les Vocations" clearly demonstrates psychic fragmentation by pairing four poet-selves with their object choices. The piece consists of a series of monologues in which the children describe in turn the object of their fascination. Each child's libido would seem to represent an important dimension of Baudelaire's own poetic

musings. In some cases, the love object is described as reflecting or involved in the formation of the speakers' identity. The first interlocutor describes his delight in the spectacle of the theater, its paintings of sea and sky, and the rich attire of the attending public. Overwhelmed by the scene's beauty, the child feels impelled to love them ("on ne peut pas s'empêcher de les aimer") and to aspire to resemble them, to dress and speak in like fashion ("cela donne envie d'être habillé de même, de dire et de faire les mêmes choses, et de parler avec la même voix"; *OC* 1: 332). Diverting his attention from the first interlocutor, the second is absorbed in his own obsession ("une fixité étonnante"), God. Head lifted toward the sky, he claims to see God, who returns the child's gaze as if to fuel the latter's narcissism: "*Lui*, aussi, on dirait qu'*il* nous regarde" (*OC* 1: 332; Baudelaire's emphasis). The third child recounts an erotic encounter with his maid, gifted with soft, silky skin. He specifically describes the act of plunging his head in her thick mane ("j'ai fourré ma tête dans ses cheveux qui pendaient dans son dos, épais comme une crinière"), a direct reference to the poem "La Chevelure" and that also echoes other fetishistic pieces of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The fourth child professes his love for a nomadic lifestyle of spontaneity, travel, music, and dance. As scholars have suggested, each child seems to represent one dimension of the poet's personality—the dandy with a preference for the artificial, the fervent believer in God, the erotic desire of a male admirer, and the adventurous, Bohemian poet of poems such as "Le Voyage" and "Les Fenêtres" that celebrate a life of adventure and the vagaries of the imagination. The unmistakable self-referentiality in "Les Vocations" that underlies each child's references to recurring motifs in Baudelaire's poetic cycles forms various medallions of selves defined by their object choices. In sum, an ego-mosaic forms as the precipitate of object-cathexes.

As already mentioned, Freud initially understood grieving as a discrete period of psychic activity, proceeding bit by bit, and through "reality testing" in which the ego gradually takes cognizance of the object's definitive absence and in the process relinquishes its emotional attachment to it ("Mourning and Melancholia" 252). Freud even explains that in some cases in which the self frees its libido from the lost object, it seeks "like a ravenously hungry man for new object-cathexes" (255). The fourth child of "Les Vocations" seems in fact to act out this manic

state. Whereas the first three children enjoy a more singular object attachment (the theater, God, woman), the fourth enjoys an unbridled libido that has not yet "re-invested" itself. He does not identify with his interlocutors' fixations, and proceeds to take delight in the itinerant nature of his desire: "Il m'a souvent semblé que mon plaisir serait d'aller toujours droit devant moi, sans savoir où, sans que personne s'en inquiète, et de voir toujours des pays nouveaux" (*OC* 1: 334). It is noteworthy that the adult narrator, whose observations frame the children's conversation, recognizes his reflection in the fourth child: "j'eus un instant l'idée bizarre que je pouvais avoir un frère à moi-même inconnu" (*OC* 1: 335). This may suggest that the personality of the manic child closely approximates the narrator's most recent or current psychic state. Having relinquished previous object-cathexes, the narrator affirms the pleasure of libidinal mobility.

But whereas in "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud contemplated the definitive relinquishing of the object-cathexis, and thus envisioned an end to mourning, in later writings he reconceptualized mourning as a never-ending process, precisely because he increasingly understood object-cathexes as "replaced by an identification." He began to regard "the self [as] a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes, [as] contain[ing] the history of those object-choices ("The Ego and the Id" 28–29). Clewell summarizes Freud's evolving notion of *Trauerarbeit* as enacting a "working through [that] depends on taking the lost other into the structure of one's own identity, a form of preserving the lost object in and as the self" (61). Writing in the wake of his daughter's death, Freud affirms mourning's interminable process: "Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute" (qtd. in Clewell 62). So whereas there certainly is a freeing up of the libido following the "acute state of mourning," and whereas we may interpret the narrator's relishing of unfettered, itinerant desire in some lyric and prose poems as such an experience, this does not imply that the self no longer identifies with or is no longer emotionally attached to seemingly former object-cathexes or to the selves associated with them. We can consider the very devotion of a poem such as "Les Vocations" to other selves and their object-choices as an indication of "the trace of the lost other," to borrow Clewell's expression.

Of special importance for this study is the act of mourning that "Les Vocations" stages with respect to the second child. After a moment of epiphany in which the child perceives God seated on a cloud, his joy quickly turns to sadness as God's apparition slowly dissolves:

> "Ah! il est déjà bien loin; tout à l'heure vous ne pourrez plus le voir. Sans doute il voyage, pour visiter tous les pays. Tenez, il va passer derrière cette rangée d'arbres qui est presque à l'horizon… et maintenant il descend derrière le clocher… Ah! on ne le voit plus!" Et l'enfant resta longtemps tourné du même côté, fixant sur la ligne qui sépare la terre du ciel des yeux où brillait une inexprimable expression d'extase et de regret. (*OC* 1: 332–33)

This anecdotal portrayal of the child's emotional investment in the divine reads as a type of mournful elegy. As God "disappears" beyond the horizon, the child "remains for a long time" turned toward God, "fixing" his sight on the point of disappearance, his eyes filled with both ecstasy and regret. The poem's staging of a "former" self in mourning could be considered a *mise-en-abyme* of the narrator's abiding mournful state. It would seem that the loss of faith is inevitably complicated by the elegiac proclivities of the self, whose identity and libido never entirely free themselves from God.

Numerous studies have been devoted to the use of irony in Baudelaire's poetry, both in *Les Fleurs du Mal* and especially in *Le Spleen de Paris* where, as Bersani states, "the process of alienating self-identification is [most] explicit" (123). If scholars have not given serious attention to the prose poems' elegiac attributes (in contrast to those of the lyric voice in "Le Cygne" or the "Spleen" pieces), this is because irony seems to overshadow and thus hide the poetics of grieving. The sentence-verses' mocking tone easily distracts our apprehension of the sobriety of grieving. I am not suggesting that we sort through the poems' ironic overlay to uncover the more important poetics of mourning. Rather, we can discuss some uses of irony in *Le Spleen de Paris* as the symptoms of an important psychic reaction to the painful loss of and especially the self's enduring identification with the cherished object. In a few key poems I propose to unpack and delineate the concurrent modes of elegy and irony to consider the possibility that through

the ironic mode, the grieving ego attempts to achieve a sense of psychic coherence that overcomes its self-contradictions.

In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the lyric voice evokes "Irony" to refer to self-awareness, which often amounts to self-recognition as evil. In "L'Héautontimorouménos" "la vorace Ironie" denotes a *prise de conscience* in which the self catches a glimpse of its sinister reflection in the mirror: "Je suis le sinistre miroir / Où la mégère se regarde" (*OC* 1: 78). It involves the self's recognition of its fallen state: "Ne suis-je pas un faux accord / Dans la divine symphonie" (*OC* 1: 78). "L'Irrémédiable" recounts precisely this fallen state as an existential falling into self-consciousness. The poem's metaphor of the "phare ironique" designates the livid star ("étoile livide") flickering in the heart of the poet, who achieves a heightened state of self-awareness referred to as "la conscience dans le Mal" (*OC* 1: 80). In *Le Spleen de Paris*, irony takes on a new function. As Bersani asserts, "the poet manages to remain a spectator, to be present only as an ironic consciousness. […] 'Voracious Irony' provides the narrative *comfort* of the *Petits poèmes en prose*" (126). Bersani further explains that irony in the later Baudelaire performs the function of self-distancing, which I regard as an ethical move to rebuke the violent impulses that the irony of *Les Fleurs du Mal* brought to consciousness without rejecting. In *Le Spleen de Paris*, irony works as a type of defense mechanism that "consists of the ego repudiating an unbearable representation and its affect, and behaving as if this representation had never reached the ego" (Bersani 126). An understanding of the super-ego as ironic would imply that Baudelairean irony has the potential to combat evil by enabling the ego to reject the part of the self prone to violence. The notion of irony as the repudiation of undesired selves has great implications for the act of mourning. Whereas the "lost" object-cathexes and their respective "former" selves continue to haunt the ego, the attempt to release libidinal investment in objects continues through irony. Concerning God, present throughout *Le Spleen de Paris* as a primary object-cathexis, irony emerges as an important vehicle of secularization.

"Laquelle est la vraie?" constitutes the collection's most overt poem of mourning. As the initial title "L'Idéal et le Réel" suggests, the piece offers a commentary on idealism and realism. The mourned object, a woman named Benedicta who incarnates the Ideal, resembles the female addressees of *Les Fleurs du Mal* who

symbolized beauty and immortality. The narrator evokes his faith in the beyond as he marvels in the powers of feminine beauty that make one believe in immortality: "J'ai connu une certaine Bénédicta, qui remplissait l'atmosphère d'idéal, et dont les yeux répandaient le désir de la grandeur, de la beauté, de la gloire et de tout ce qui fait croire à l'immortalité" (*OC* 1: 342). As in so many of Baudelaire's poems, here the Ideal and the divine become synonymous as ideal woman acquires god-like qualities, even plays the role of divine signifier. The name "Benedicta" echoes the title of the lyric poem "Bénédiction," thereby suggesting a divine blessing. Her ability to inspire faith in immortality and her description in the very next sentence as miraculous ("cette fille miraculeuse") underscore the inseparability of the Ideal and the supernatural. Claude Pichois observes that this reverence of woman as a sign of immortality recalls the lyric poem "Hymne" in which the self salutes his angelic addressee "en l'immortalité" (in Baudelaire, *OC* 1: 162, 1344). Similarly, Holland reads the prose poem's first paragraph as reminiscent of the statuesque goddess in "La Beauté" (200).

The narrator emphasizes in the second paragraph that at Benedicta's death, he himself buried her. In his description of the burial, the natural commingles with the supernatural. Much like "Correspondances," nature acts as a temple, infusing the bucolic cemetery with the scent of a censer:

> Mais cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps; aussi est-elle morte quelques jours après que j'eus fait sa connaissance, et c'est moi-même qui l'ai enterrée, un jour que le printemps agitait son encensoir jusque dans les cimetières. C'est moi qui l'ai enterrée, bien close dans une bière d'un bois parfumé et incorruptible comme les coffres de l'Inde. (*OC* 1: 342)

The use of the word *censer* not only recalls the spirituality of "Correspondances," but more specifically the Catholic mysticism of "Harmonie du soir," in which at the setting of the sun, flowers evaporate in the manner of a censer ("chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir"; *OC* 1: 47). *Encensoir* also appears in "Hymne" as a metaphor of the immortal idol's divine scent. The act of mourning is emphasized here in several ways. Through repetition of the already emphatic locution "*c'est moi qui* l'ai enterrée," and the narrator's insistence on the hermetically sealed coffin ("bien

close"), made of a wood endowed with a perfumed preserving agent ("un bois parfumé et incorruptible"), the poem underscores the dimension of mourning that, through funeral rituals whose aim is to "memorialize" the departed loved one, both physically and psychically prolongs her existence. Through the lost object's hypercathexization, the poetics of grieving maintains the deceased vividly present.

As the narrator contemplates the tomb of his cherished Benedicta, a figure curiously resembling the deceased appears before him, stamping the soil, and declaring herself to be the "real" Benedicta. To punish the narrator's "folie" and "aveuglement," she insists that he will love her as she is:

> Et comme mes yeux restaient fichés sur le lieu où était enfoui mon trésor, je vis subitement une petite personne qui ressemblait singulièrement à la défunte, et qui, piétinant sur la terre fraîche avec une violence hystérique et bizarre, disait en éclatant de rire: "C'est moi, la vraie Bénédicta! C'est moi, une fameuse canaille! Et pour la punition de ta folie et de ton aveuglement, tu m'aimeras telle que je suis!" (*OC* 1: 342)

Johnson has referred to the etymology of the name Benedicta—that which is well said—to consider this poem as a commentary on poetry.[38] Accordingly, this paragraph sharply contrasts two "Bénédicta," one symbolizing the idealism of the romantic poet-messiah, assisted by the intertextual references to "Hymne," "Correspondances," "Harmonie du soir," and "Bénédiction," and the other referencing the realism to which the materialist, urban poetry of *Le Spleen de Paris* has turned. The paragraph juxtaposes the narrator's relentless obsession with the deceased Benedicta—his eyes remained stuck on ("fichés sur") the place of her interment—and the living Benedicta, now demanding his attention. The elegiac self refuses to relinquish the lost object, in spite of the fact that a substitute—the "next" Benedicta—is already beckoning. The last paragraph dramatizes this refusal:

> Mais moi, furieux, j'ai répondu: "Non! non! non!" Et pour mieux accentuer mon refus, j'ai frappé si violemment la terre du pied que ma jambe s'est enfoncée jusqu'au genou dans la sépulture récente, et que, comme un loup pris au piège, je reste attaché, pour toujours peut-être, à la fosse de l'idéal. (*OC* 1: 342)

In the light of Baudelaire's turn toward a realist prose poetry, this refusal can be understood as one in which the narrator, although officially abandoning idealism, nonetheless continues to regret and mourn over the loss of lyricism. After all, this abandonment is quite recent ("la sépulture récente"). The fact that one of the poet's legs sinks into the tomb of the ideal Benedicta while the other remains on the ground suggests both his continued emotional investment in the poetry of the Ideal as well as his move toward realism. This would explain why the second Benedicta is intimately associated with the earth, for she first appears to the poet in the mud ("la terre fraîche") and, like the poet, stamps it. The fact that Baudelaire continued to write lyric poems as he began composing in prose further corroborates the notion of the poet's enduring attraction to verse.

Holland has commented on the importance of verb tense in this poem as indicative of the elegiac narrator's psychic disposition. Whereas the entire prose poem is written in the past tenses, the verb *to remain* of the final sentence is conjugated in the present. Holland aptly concludes that "the narrator is therefore at present still bound to the ideal… or more precisely to the *grave* of the ideal: recognition of its demise does not preclude continuing attachment on the narrator's part" (201). A further indication of the narrator's unreadiness to convert to a realist esthetics is the unsightly apparition of the true Benedicta, which Holland describes as the Ideal's "grotesque miniature" (200). Not only is she described as hysterical and claiming to be a "fameuse canaille," in another version of the poem the familiar language that she speaks, "ce patois familier de la canaille," is one that the narrator's sense of modesty is unable to relate ("que ma pudeur ne saurait reproduire"; *OC* 1: 1344). And yet, the paradox lies in the fact that the narrator is writing this poem not in the lofty register of verse but in prose.

In what ways does the prose poem enact a "bit-by-bit" economics of mourning in which the ego performs a series of "reality tests" in order to detach itself from the object-cathexis? If there is a movement of distanciation with respect to idealism, it lies first in the narrator's refusal to speak in verse. But we must also ask if there is not also a psycho-dynamics within the prose that further mitigates the otherwise disquieting and identity-threatening pull of a "former" or "other" self, the lyrical self that the narrator of

prose poems must keep at bay. The poem in fact possesses an awkward tone that undercuts the otherwise elegiac eulogy of the ideal Benedicta, an ironic undercurrent that unsettles the pedestal of the idealist's muse. The poem's intertextuality has the potential to separate a past self from the present. A reader all too familiar with *Les Fleurs du Mal* will read the intertextual references of the prose poem's first two paragraphs as exaggerated, and therefore as overdetermining the narrator's idealism. What's more, the narrator's idealist spirit seems deliberately to draw too much attention to itself. Whereas in the lyric poem "Hymne," the idol fills the speaker's heart with "clarté," a signifier that imbues the poem with a luminosity that resonates with platonic spiritualism, Benedicta fills the atmosphere with "idéal" itself (162, 342). The use of "idéal" as opposed to "clarté" effects a psychic distanciation through the act of labeling. And in contrast to the feminine addressee of "Hymne" who is quite simply "immortelle" ("à l'ange, à l'idole immortelle"), Benedicta "*fait* croire à l'immortalité." Whereas the notion of immortality in "Hymne" is immediate, the expression *faire croire* of the prose poem instills doubt in the narrator's faith, thereby framing the immortality of spiritual idealism with ironic self-consciousness. And then there is the curious sentence in which the narrator explains that "cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps." The choice of the term *fille*, which resonates a familiar and perhaps vulgar tone, strikes a false chord with *miraculeuse*, which in this instance appears as an all too formulaic qualifier for the spiritual. And the narrator's description of Benedicta in the awkward superlative *trop belle* further leads us to read her entire depiction as a caricature. This interpretation would corroborate McLees's thesis that much of Baudelaire's poetry "reflects the aesthetics of caricature," replete with the stylistic devices of disparity and distortion that mock traditional poetic forms, and that lead to self-parody (xv, 18, 61). But it would be wrong to read the entire text of "Laquelle est la vraie?" as a caricature of idealist excesses. As we have seen, the poem is primarily engaged in the act of mourning and features the tension between two esthetic forms. One could no doubt also read the description of the hysterical "fameuse canaille" as a caricature of realism. My reading insists that the ironic elements of the text work alongside—or rather, as a counterpoint to—the narrative's elegiac disposition in functioning as a type of defense mechanism that repudiates an unwanted

self-image. The poem leaves us with the story of an excessive idealist poet at odds with an otherwise still crystallizing realist. Irony plays the crucial role of managing the contradictory psychic forces of the grieving ego.

Brief mention of "Le Mauvais Vitrier" will help us to better appreciate the ethical implications of irony as defense mechanism. When compared to "Laquelle est la vraie?," the conclusion of "Le Mauvais Vitrier" is exceptionally violent. Enraged by a peddling glazier deemed "bad" because he does not sell rose-colored glass that would capture the world in an ideal light, the narrator shoves him out of his abode. As the merchant goes on his way, the narrator drops from his window a flowerpot, which he refers to as an "engin de guerre," in order to shatter the peddler's glass merchandise (*OC* 1: 287). In the absence of a level of textual irony that would safely frame the lost object of idealism, that is to say, to achieve a level of self-awareness of one's object-cathexes, the narrator violently rages against that which does not resemble and in fact seems to threaten the cherished object's memory. Notwithstanding "Le Mauvais Vitrier," irony in *Le Spleen de Paris* assists in the mourning process in such a way that it mitigates the self's attachment to the lost object; it partially undoes the ego's borderline psychosis in which nothing in the world exists except that which pertains to the lost object (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 249).

Analogous instances of self-mocking irony with respect to a lost object appear in "La Chambre double." Similar to "Laquelle est la vraie?," this prose poem neatly divides itself in two parts. The first offers an idealist description of the narrator's intimate quarters decorated in lavish fabrics that betray intimate correspondences with beautiful elements of nature. Moreover, a mysterious feminine beauty referred to as an "Idole" sits enthroned on a bed of voluptuous pleasure. This living space in no way reflects mid-nineteenth-century realist esthetics. In fact, the narrator specifically makes reference to "l'art positif" as absent from the art of pure reverie that adorns the walls. In stark contrast, the second part presents a realist(ic) description of the decrepit and desolate interior that the narrator seems to recognize as such when not under opium's influence. The poem's halfway point recounts the loss of the "Idole" who disappears at the sound of a knock at the door: "La chambre paradisiaque, l'idole, la souveraine des rêves, la

Sylphide, comme disait le grand René, toute cette magie a disparu au coup brutal" (*OC* 1: 281). The narrator repeatedly voices his regret for the dissolution of this enchanted world, a lost Eden: "Et ce parfum d'un autre monde, dont je m'enivrais avec une sensibilité perfectionnée, hélas! il est remplacé par une fétide odeur" (*OC* 1: 281). Stephens links the descriptive space of "La Chambre double" with Baudelaire's notion of lyricism, whereas what is knocking at the door is prose itself (32–36). In expressing regret for the idealist's illusions of the mystical, "La Chambre double" can further be read as the flipside of *Les Paradis artificiels*'s ethical position that rejects the artist's resort to the "pharmacy" for inspiration and his neglect for the "reality" of earthly concerns (see Chapter 1). The only object present that reminds the narrator of this lost paradise is the vial that contained the opium: "Dans ce monde étroit, mais si plein de dégoût, un seul objet connu me sourit: la fiole de laudanum" (*OC* 1: 281). The drug user's description of the vial—a substitute object for the absent object-cathexis—exhibits symptoms of psychosis underlying the grieving process. For the elegiac narrator, the vial alone matters. In the poem's conclusion, the narrator laments the harsh realities of daily existence, which the metaphor of Time as dictator conveys. Ousted from the Garden of Eden, he is "damned" to what he perceives to be a living hell: "Vis donc, damné!" (*OC* 1: 282).

Once again, it would be wrong to curtail our reading here. Not simply a straightforward lamentation over a lost, enchanted world, "La Chambre double" mollifies its own melancholic tone through an ironic portrayal of the ideal. To begin, the narrator's emotional investment in the vial is quite ambivalent, inspiring both love and hate: "une vieille et terrible amie; comme toutes les amies, hélas! féconde en caresses et en traîtrises" (*OC* 1: 281). The vial's description as a betrayal dramatizes the ethical turn in *Les Paradis artificiels* away from hallucinogens and toward a lucid confrontation of the realities of the quotidian. This ambivalence can be perceived through various ways in which the idyllic bedroom is described. As early as the first sentences of the text, the narrator's choice of words undercuts the "rose-colored" glass through which we would otherwise perceive the room:

> Une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement *spirituelle*, où l'atmosphère stagnante est légèrement teintée de rose et de bleu.

> L'âme y prend un bain de paresse, aromatisé par le regret et le désir. —C'est quelque chose de crépusculaire, de bleuâtre et de rosâtre; un rêve de volupté pendant une éclipse.
>
> Les meubles ont des formes allongées, prostrées, alanguies. Les meubles ont l'air de rêver; on les dirait doués d'une vie somnambulique, comme le végétal et le minéral. Les étoffes parlent une langue muette, comme les fleurs, comme les ciels, comme les soleils couchants. (*OC* 1: 280; emphasis in original)

The italicization of *spirituelle* endows the poem with a heightened self-awareness of its idealist musings, further accentuated by the word *rêverie*. By Baudelaire's time, the term undoubtedly bordered on the cliché as a stock signifier for an esthetics of artifice inherited from titles and descriptions of rococo painters. In contrast, the term *stagnant* surprises the otherwise artificial beauty of the *mise-en-scène* in belonging to a more typically material register connoting immobility. Often employed in the context of the filth deposits of sewage, or of a stifling heat, the term sharply contrasts with the sense of lofty weightlessness in rococo paintings. The choice of the word *paresse* ("laziness") and the repetition of the potentially pejorative suffix *-âtre* in the second paragraph further serve to establish a cognitive distance between the elegiac self and its libidinal objects that otherwise instill the passage with "le regret et le désir." The final sentence of the third paragraph, in featuring the hidden spiritual language of things, echoes the metaphysical and symbolist doctrine of universal analogy. Accordingly, it serves as a summary of "Correspondances" and is a direct reference to "Élévation" in which the speaking subject "elevates" himself above the natural to enter into "le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes" (*OC* 1: 10). But in light of the preceding brush strokes of irony, the reader is tempted to read the poet's relishing of cosmological harmony as pastiche or caricature.

The ironic gestures throughout the text (of which we do not have the space here to provide an exhaustive description) do not, however, entirely erase the affect of the trauma of loss that dominates in the second half. After the disappearance of the "Idole," the demands of the Real, as personified by time, set in:

> Oh! oui! le Temps a reparu; le Temps règne en souverain maintenant; et avec le hideux vieillard est revenu tout son démoniaque cortège de Souvenirs, de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d'Angoisses, de Cauchemars, de Colères et de Névroses. (*OC* 1: 281)

Here it would seem that the elegiac self is working through the reality of things, notably the death of the Ideal. One could speculate the reasons for the capitalization of terms ("Souvenirs," "Regrets," etc.) as yet another example of stylization to distance oneself from the enduring affects of trauma. Throughout the poem, the variety of stylistic effects can be interpreted as symptoms of the psychic mechanism of "reality testing," theorized by Freud as an important dimension of the mournful ego's weaning itself off its lost object-cathexis.

The act of mourning also provides the theme of the prose poem "Déjà!" Its narrator, aboard a ship at sail for several months, takes delight in the sublime spectacle of the immense sea and the celestial qualities of the firmament above. However, as the ship begins its return voyage, and land appears on the horizon, the other passengers complain of the sea's monotonous rocking and salty atmosphere, and anticipate with great joy the moment in which they set foot on solid ground to savor the comforts of an immobile hearth. The narrator alone is overcome with sadness because he is unable to detach himself from the seductiveness of the ocean's expanse. Only reluctantly does he accept his fate to bid the sea farewell. Instead of joining his fellow passengers in emitting an emphatic "At last!," he can only shout a lamenting "Already!" And yet, the poem's concluding paragraph signals a change in attitude as if the narrator begins to see that land holds its own treasures: "ses bruits, ses passions, ses commodités, ses fêtes; c'était une terre riche et magnifique, pleine de promesses, […] d'où les musiques de la vie nous arrivaient en un amoureux murmure" (*OC* 1: 338). The narrator's grieving over the sea allegorizes the poet's own reluctant transition from the mystical to a poetry "grounded" in the affairs of men. As in so many of Baudelaire's poems, "Déjà!" does not fail to link the Ideal to the notion of God. In decrying his reluctance to leave the sea, the narrator likens himself to a priest whose God has been seized from him:

> Moi seul j'étais triste, inconcevablement triste. Semblable à un prêtre à qui on arracherait sa divinité, je ne pouvais, sans une navrante amertume, me détacher de cette mer si monstrueusement séduisante […]. En disant adieu à cette incomparable beauté, je me sentais abattu jusqu'à la mort. (*OC* 1: 338)

In the poem's tight association between the ideal and the divine, the narrator's a*dieu* to the sea is another version of the self's relinquishing of *Dieu.*

Bersani describes the lyric voice of *Les Fleurs du Mal* as an "unanchored self" that takes pleasure in the "psychic dislocations implicit in poetic fantasy." The fantasy of desire triggered by the female body often effects a cradling type movement, such as that of a boat at sea (15, 44). But this mobilization of fantasy in the libido's investment in the love object often provokes a contrary movement in which the self attempts to "anchor" itself. In order to allay the feeling of anxiety that accompanies the sense of identity destabilization resulting from the heightened pleasure of mobility triggered by the desired object, the lyric ego engages in an "anchoring" poetics that reinstills a sense of self-coherence (Bersani 61). In the prose poem "Déjà!," on the other hand, the desired object is lost—or at least its loss is imminent. In fact, it stages the traumatic moment of loss as the boat approaches land. As the self must begin the psychic process of grieving, it experiences anxiety in having to detach itself from the object of desire. In mourning, the love object, rather than appearing as an "other" that threatens the self by mobilizing its desire, becomes a source of self-identification. Emotional investment in the lost object that constitutes the mourning process seeks to "anchor" the ego. In extending Bersani's insight into *Les Fleurs du Mal* to the elegiac ego of *Le Spleen de Paris*, it could be said that whereas the lyricism of *Les Fleurs* is born of the acutely desiring ego whose sense of identity is threatened by the female body, in the "wake" of the boat approaching land in "Déjà!" lyricism becomes a self-identifying anchor, a poetic self-object whose dissolution is sensed as a threat to the narcissistic ego's very existence ("Je me sentais abattu jusqu'à la mort").

In "Déjà!," the move to alleviate the traumatic affect of (self-) loss involves not so much self-irony as a curious partial return to the mystical in the last paragraph. Whereas throughout the prose poem, the ego expresses feelings of regret, nostalgia, and despair, the piece concludes by endowing reality—personified by the earth or land—with a sense of the numinous:

> Cependant c'était la terre, la terre avec ses bruits, ses passions, ses commodités, ses fêtes; c'était une terre riche et magnifique, pleine de promesses, qui nous envoyait un mystérieux parfum de rose et de musc, et d'où les musiques de la vie nous arrivaient en un amoureux murmure. (*OC* 1: 338)

In this instance, land, which stands for a poetry of the real, acquires attributes of the mourned lyric self. Lacking in irony, the

many "correspondances" among the different senses—comprised of associations between the fragrances of flowers and musk with colors ("rose") and the music of lovers—seem almost to resurrect Baudelaire, the synesthete symbolist. The conclusion reads as a partial recuperation of the mystical as the elegiac self copes with the loss of the object-cathexis by psychically transforming a new object into its likeness.

Verlaine and the Return of the Sacred

The resacralization of poetry in Verlaine's later collections offers a counter-example to the case of Baudelaire that may provide further insight into the secularization of poetry and serve as a springboard for themes developed in subsequent chapters. Verlaine's poetry, like Baudelaire's, demonstrates that the process of secularization involves an enduring psychic investment in the notion of God, but in quite different fashion. The early works of both poets resemble each other in significant ways. Biographers and scholars underscore Verlaine's admiration of Baudelaire before all other poets (except perhaps Rimbaud), and claim passages of *Les Fleurs du Mal* as inspiration for the symbolism of Verlaine's poetry.[39] Notwithstanding a number of differences in the poets' esthetic ideologies, their early poetry can be compared through a shared aspiration toward a spiritual Ideal of which the physical realm constituted the symbols. And yet, in diametrical opposition to Baudelaire's later works, Verlaine's bear the mark of resacralization, that is to say, a forceful and unequivocal rehabilitation of the notion of God and the embrace of a Catholic vision that regards the world as the battlefield for the spiritual forces of good and evil.

One crucial difference between Verlaine's early poetry and Baudelaire's is that before he converted to Catholicism, Verlaine's idealism was utterly bereft of Christian thought and symbolism. Whereas one could not imagine the possibility of *Les Fleurs du Mal* if one subtracted Baudelaire's childhood faith, Verlaine's Catholic upbringing and adolescent fervor for God seem to have dissolved long before he began composing. As his biographer Pierre Petitfils observes, shortly after his first communion Verlaine demonstrated utter indifference toward religion that would remain with him for many years (25–27). And as Jacques-Henry Bornecque eloquently explains: "Une *bonne* première communion, fervente, pleine du sentiment de la présence réelle. Mais sans aucun lendemain" (15).

Indeed, the nature of early collections such as *Poèmes saturniens* (1866) and *Fêtes galantes* (1869), praised for their landscapes more spiritual than material, of lofty, dreamy, fairy-tale worlds painted through a poetics of suggestion and deliberate ambiguity, of ephemeral moments of abandon and delight, contain no explicit references to the Christian universe of God, Satan, or Christ. In contrast to the Catholic mysticism of Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir," Verlaine's mystical rendition of nightfall in "Crépuscule du soir mystique" is only conveyed through botanical imagery (70). While it would be too simplistic, in light of its spiritual idealism, to describe Verlaine's poetry as wholly secular, it is certainly of a different nature from the poet's "post-conversion" poetry in which the Ideal acquires a definitive name: Jesus.

Scholars attribute Verlaine's conversion in 1873 to Catholicism to the poet's distressed mental state. After a period of years in which Verlaine wavered—often in existential anguish—between a bourgeois life of order, security, and prosperity with his wife Mathilde and one of adventure, frenzy, and the sense of absolute freedom with Rimbaud, the poet lost it all: his freedom, his two loves, and his two lives. His incarceration, his rupture with Rimbaud, and Mathilde's request for divorce led to Verlaine's study of the Bible, Saint Augustine, and other prominent Catholic writers, long discussions with the prison chaplain, and eventually the Catholic rites of conversion, including confession and communion.[40] But months before his conversion, Verlaine's poetics already marked a shift toward a Catholic vision, and therefore can be understood as having paved the way for official conversion. As Petitfils argues: "La religion a d'abord été pour lui un 'système' littéraire. La lettre a précédé l'esprit" (202). Verlaine's turn toward a poetics of the sacred was his response to the need to make sense of the unfortunate turn of events that afflicted him.

Written several months before his official conversion, "Crimen amoris" constitutes a definitive break in Verlaine's poetics by reinterpreting his past—including his embrace of Rimbaud's poetic vision that so enticed him—in metaphysical terms. More specifically, the poem casts Rimbaud as a satanic figure whose revolutionary poetry constituted an act of rebellion against God by attempting to destroy hell itself as well as the Christian duality of good versus evil. But in the end, God maintains the upper hand by smiting the satanic rebellion and preserving good from

evil (378–80). In *Sagesse* (1880), a post-conversion collection of poems, Verlaine adopts the Catholic perspective on suffering to give meaning to his anguish. What first appeared to him as a terrible misfortune is reinterpreted as God's act of grace. In the very first verses of the collection, Verlaine describes his conversion as pain inflicted from above (240).[41] The poet's wounds bear the mark of God's blessing, which is described as a searing. And yet, the humble convert does not feel worthy of his afflictions. The voice of God, welcomed by the lyric self, is described as both pain and pleasure. Good and evil become one and the same experience of divine election:

> —Ah! Seigneur, qu'ai-je? Hélas! me voici tout en larmes
> D'une joie extraordinaire: votre voix
> Me fait comme du bien et du mal à la fois,
> Et le mal et le bien, tout a les mêmes charmes.
>
> Je ris, je pleure, et c'est comme un appel aux armes
> D'un clarion pour des champs de bataille où je vois
> Des anges bleus et blancs portés sur des pavois,
> Et ce clarion m'enlève en de fières alarmes.
>
> J'ai l'extase et j'ai la terreur d'être choisi. (272)

The perception of misfortune as serving a greater good is strongly conveyed in later poems when Verlaine grapples with the death of Lucien Létinois, an adolescent with whom he had developed a paternal relationship. In the final section of the collection *Amour*, in the cycle of poems dedicated to Létinois, Verlaine presents the death of "his son" as a necessary suffering for the perfection of the poet's conversion, that is to say, to assure his complete devotion to God. More specifically, Lucien's death allows the poet to identify with God who lost his own son on the cross.[42] Whereas the later Baudelaire found the notion of God absurd in the face of human suffering, Verlaine looked to God to endow his sufferings with meaning. Whereas Baudelaire's evolving secular vision considered the sufferings of the innocent to be an indictment of belief in God, Verlaine understood what unbelievers perceive as evil to be a testimony of God's goodness and favor. In line with this Catholic vision, Verlaine's poems constitute genuine prayers that assume direct communication with the divine. In her study, Eléonore Zimmermann explains that Verlaine's early poetry of

uncertainty, absence, nuance, and nature transforms upon conversion into a Christian *Weltanschauung* of certainty, presence, and contrast (171–79).

What becomes apparent in the juxtaposition of Baudelaire's and Verlaine's poetry is that secularization or sacralization hinge in large part on the attempt to understand human suffering. At a time in French society when sacred and secular thought were equally influential, it is perhaps a question of individual psychology that explains why one writer adopted a philosophy of suffering founded on Christian theology and why another adopted a sociological and psychological perspective. However, I propose here—and will develop the theory in following chapters—that because Baudelaire consciously and consistently incorporated notions of the religious in his writings, he in fact steered clear of religious conversion. It could be argued, on the other hand, that in eliminating all references to the deity in his early poetry, Verlaine in fact repressed his childhood faith. Perhaps because he blocked religious sentiment from his field of vision, the religious all the more forcefully resurfaced during a time of acute emotional distress. What I am only proposing here as food for thought will be more thoroughly examined in my study of Huysmans in Chapter 3. Overall, the similarities and differences concerning the role of the religious in Baudelaire's and Verlaine's poetry, as well as the inconsistencies and tension between the religious and the secular that characterize their collected works, are certainly the products of a curious period of transition in France in which society as a whole was embracing secular thought all the while continuing to raise children in the Catholic faith.

Chapter Three

Sublimation and Conversion in Zola and Huysmans

The generation that followed Baudelaire's was especially jolted by the opposing forces of secularism and religion. On the one hand, a series of laws that sought to weaken the Church's influence in the public sphere officially inaugurated the secularization of French society under the Third Republic. The *laïcisation* of the French public school system, abolition of the parochial character of cemeteries, suppression of the obligatory "repos dominical," legalization of divorce in the 1880s, and definitive separation of Church and State in 1905, formed a period of "dechristianization" that, as historians Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire explain in their illuminating study *Histoire religieuse de la France, 1880–1914*, amounted to the marginalization of religion in all aspects of French society and its relegation to private affairs (172). Correspondingly, numerous positivist thinkers including Auguste Comte, Emile Littré, Ernest Renan, and Hippolyte Taine disseminated among French readers "une conception rationaliste de l'univers d'où tout surnaturel est exclu" (19). This increasingly mainstream secular vision largely inspired the burgeoning naturalist movement.

The forces of secularization met with a no-less-significant spiritual renewal in French society that translated into a marked increase in baptisms, church attendance, and national pilgrimages, changed the face of the country's city centers with the construction of new churches and grandiose basilicas, and was dramatically reinforced by the conversion of famous writers and intellectuals to the Catholic faith. The erection of twenty-four new churches in Paris alone, the construction of the capital's Sacred Heart Basilica and Lyon's Notre Dame de Fourvière, the flourishing of national shrines such as Lourdes, the emergence of a mystical Catholic literary movement, the multiplication of

Catholic publications and workers' unions, and the birth of the reactionary political movement *Action française* that advocated the restoration of Roman Catholicism as the state religion, were overt indications of what Cholvy and Hilaire describe as the nation's spiritual rebirth (120, 143).

Given this spiritual revival, secularization in *fin-de-siècle* France does not follow a neat, linear progression in which religious practices and sentiment gradually recede. This raises important questions regarding the possible causal relationship between the religious and the secular in modern society. For instance, does the strengthening of one trigger the intensification of the other? To be sure, the forces of secularism and religion have coexisted in French society and have perpetually challenged one another since at least the Enlightenment. However, under the Third Republic two separate cultures, indeed two Frances, emerged in a more institutionalized way. As the secularization of public schools triggered the growth of parochial schooling, two distinct systems of education, each possessing its own values and traditions, took form. Consequently, as Cholvy and Hilaire explain, "deux cultures se dessinent, deux France s'opposent," one which celebrated the centennial of the French Revolution while the other the fourteenth centennial of King Clovis's baptism (64). Accordingly, historians have argued that the spiritual revival of the last decades of the nineteenth century was largely occasioned by secularism itself. After all, Catholicism's apogee in modern France followed by only one decade the series of secularizing legislative acts of the 1880s. For instance, in some regions the rate of baptisms among newborns steadily declined to their lowest point in 1882, only to resurge to 84% by 1912 (Cholvy and Hilaire 30). Cholvy and Hilaire also document a flourishing in the early twentieth century of Christian "reunions," parish councils, and cantonal committees whose purpose was to defend Catholicism and disseminate the faith (150). As such, the historians contend that secularism's very threat to the Church was the primary cause of its rehabilitation: "L'Église de France, menacée, se trouve réhabilitée" (146). Consequently, Cholvy and Hilaire do not regard secularization in France as a linear progression, nor religion as a gradual collapse, but perceive both forces throughout the nineteenth century as forming a complex ebb and flow ("flux et reflux"; 175).

Other questions arise concerning the nature of secularization. How and to what extent does it effectively fill the void left by the

official eradication of religion from the public sphere? Numerous studies have observed that secular thought often resembles, if not closely imitates, religious traditions. For instance, Cholvy and Hilaire observe that the secular cult under the Third Republic that paid homage to Marianne—the feminine national emblem of the French Republic—uncannily resembled Catholics' adoration of the Virgin Mary (21). Certainly, this was nothing new, as French society had witnessed a secular imitation of religion in the first years of the 1789 Revolution, notably the *Culte de la Raison*. Our observation of secularization in late nineteenth-century France as accompanied by resurgences in religious thought and sentiment, and often bearing a striking resemblance to the Catholic faith that it aimed to supplant, serves as the historical context for a psychological study of secularization in contemporaneous literary texts. Zola's and Huysmans's narratives, born of the tension between secular and religious thought, make strikingly manifest the complexities of secularization.

The secularizing ideology underlying the naturalist movement is what Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* has labeled the subtraction theory. This theory contends that we can discover the truth of human nature once we abandon our metaphysical illusions. This discovery involves the recognition that we are simply thinking creatures united in societies and driven by ordinary desires (253, 294). The subtraction theory forms part of a larger shift in Western thought, first prominent during the Enlightenment, from a paradigm that perceives the world as "enchanted" to one that is "disenchanted." Whereas an enchanted world is governed by a variety of spiritual forces incessantly coming into contact with a "porous" self that feels intimately connected to the physical and spiritual world, in a disenchanted world the spirit realm recedes, the mind becomes the locus of thoughts, feelings, and intent, and the individual becomes self-reflexive, "buffered" from her environment, and confident in her "own powers of moral ordering" (Taylor 27) As a primary example of the subtraction theory, naturalism seeks to unveil human nature by simultaneously debunking the metaphysical illusions instilled in us through religious doctrine, and by shining the light of truth on our brute state of being. This often translates into a nihilistic literary vision of an unredeemingly materialist world in which the individual is reduced to base biological drives. But Zola's readers are well aware that not all religious notions are easily "subtracted." The novelist's depiction of

the natural world does not constitute a clean break with religious thought. *Thérèse Raquin*, which Zola construed as strictly a physiological experiment, paradoxically retains the theological notions of evil and divine retribution. In this novel, the world regains its "enchanted" qualities as the body acquires unequivocally divine characteristics in punishing evildoers and assuring that good prevails. The resurgence of godly figures in the narrative is certainly not deliberate, and can be explained psychologically as a subconscious wish fulfillment for an underlying universal order. Jacques Lacan's proclamation that God is not dead but "unconscious" is especially applicable to Zola.

Seeming incongruences in Zola's literary project of secularization persist in the *Rougon-Macquart* volumes and late novels in which potentially material depictions of the human condition exhibit arresting attributes of the fantastic. To begin to account for what appears to be a "respiritualization" of the material, I will turn to Kant's notion of the sublime, Freud's related notion of sublimation, and the role that Julia Kristeva attributes to sublimation in her psycho-literary theory of the abject. Taylor makes the observation that Kant's elaboration of the sublime appeared at a time in Western thought when the buffered self of the disenchanted world was solidifying. As the individual was becoming radically self-absorbed, the notion of the sublime responded to an underlying need to aspire to something beyond ourselves (335–44). In *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Weiskel similarly notes that the sublime in Western literature revives as God withdraws from an immediate participation in the experience of humanity (3). As part of this emerging tradition, Kant locates the sublime in the natural world. The self's inability to immediately intuit the infinity of an overwhelming natural object creates a negative affect; above all the self perceives the object as an abyss that threatens its integrity. But the failure of the imagination is subsequently counteracted by the pleasure derived from reason's assertion of the concept of infinity, that is to say, from the shaping of moral integrity that results from reason's resistance to the sublime's annihilating presence. Similarly, the psychoanalytic act of sublimation constitutes a defense mechanism that aims to protect the subject from the affect of anxiety that accompanies the apprehension of a godless world of chaos, violence, and destruction. In sum, both Freud and Kant uncover a psychic transmutation into positive pleasure

of those disturbing affects that the ego perceives as originating from outside and as threatening the self. In her discussion of the abject in literature, Kristeva similarly describes sublimation as a survival mechanism in which the ego keeps the abject—that which threatens the self's integrity and sense of an ordered universe—under control. She interprets stylization in writing as an act of sublimation in which the writer "thrusts aside" as "other" or "abject" a world of animals, the representatives of sex and murder, in order to "attain the rank of incommensurate ideal" (12, 16). Kristeva understands religion as the ultimate sublimation that purifies the self by separating sin, taboo, and transgression from God and the sense of sanctification. Following her evaluation of modern literature and its purifying sublimations as "our secular religion," we can begin to discuss especially Zola's naturalism as perpetually exhibiting the dual mechanisms of (1) positing a resolutely materialist vision of a godless universe and (2) redeeming it through sublimation into a quasi-religious vision that rescues the text's "consciousness" from nihilism's destructive a/effects. The self regains its existential footing both by regarding as "evil" the forces that the self nauseously perceives as threatening, and by erecting counter images of the Good. Interdisciplinary theory on the sublime will assist us in identifying instances of psychic compensation at work in the secularizing force of naturalist works that transmute threatening "others"—female sexuality, the working class, capitalism—into images of transcendence.

The function of religious themes and symbols in Huysmans's works is equally informative. Although the writer was regarded as Zola's disciple, Huysmans's literary project diverges from Zola's in two significant ways. First, in painting a materialist human condition bereft of any redemptive meaning, Huysmans's early narratives do not unleash counterforces aimed to assuage this vision's disarming a/effects with compensatory brushstrokes of the numinous. From this perspective, one could argue that Huysmans adhered more readily than Zola to the ideology of naturalist fiction that purported to examine phenomena through the lens of the impassive scientist and without considering unobservable causes. Second, we must significantly qualify our description of the "purity" of Huysmans's naturalism by taking note that the novelist eventually broke with the naturalist school. A seemingly new interest in the occult, mysticism, and notions of the divine lend to

his later writings their very substance. Logically, Huysmans's move to infuse his literary vision with the spiritual, to reconsider the world as "enchanted," corresponds to his biographical conversion to Catholicism.

The functions of conversion—as manifest in the trajectory effected in Huysmans's opus from a disenchanted to an enchanted world—are analogous to the textual mechanisms of sublimation in Zola's fiction. Vaheed Ramazani's choice of words in describing "sublimation" in modern literature as a "conversion" of "fear into triumph, matter into spirit, mobility and chaos into fixity and order" will assist us in regarding sublimation and conversion as psychically akin (43). Along these lines, conversion in Huysmans acquires the appearance of *delayed* sublimation. In comparing the nature of sublimation in Zola and in Huysmans, I will discuss the possibility that Zola's ongoing engagement with notions of the divine helped sustain, in fact, his project of secularization. On the other hand, Huysmans's absolute reduction of the human condition to the material corresponds to a repression of psychic investment in the divine, thereby forcing a more direct form of confrontation with the spiritual by way of religious conversion.

Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*: The Anatomy of a Murder and the Unconscious God

Developing theories in human pathology were largely responsible for the body's rising importance in literary texts of nineteenth-century France. Many writers were greatly influenced by the premise at the core of the "sciences" of criminology, physiognomy, and phrenology, which claimed a strong correlation between anatomy and behavior. Accordingly, the traditionally religious question of evil fused with—and was inevitably transmuted by—the still highly speculative study of heredity and bodily drives. While the body has long been associated with evil and shunned as a hindrance to the human will, as in Pauline Christianity, the acclaimed "scientific" focus in naturalist texts represented a significant departure from theological discourses on evil by portraying the body not as the polar opposite of a divinity, but as the sole object of reflection on human behavior. It is in the vein of the secularization of evil that Zola wrote his first novel *Thérèse Raquin*.

By Zola's time, medical science had already left its mark on the Realist novel. But with the publication of *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Zola surpassed his predecessors by attempting to construct a plot solely upon the description of physiological phenomena. In the oft-cited preface to the second edition that elaborates on the "experimental method" at the foundation of naturalist fiction, Zola offers his novel as a scientific study of the body by likening his work to that of a surgeon:

> On commence, j'espère, à comprendre que mon but a été un but scientifique avant tout […]. Qu'on lise le roman avec soin, on verra que chaque chapitre est l'étude d'un cas curieux de physiologie […]. J'ai simplement fait sur deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirurgiens font sur des cadavres. (8–9)

His story of two lovers who commit murder in order to pursue their love affair, Zola claims, is actually a story of bodies:

> J'ai choisi des personnages souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang, dépourvus de libre arbitre, entraînés à chaque acte de leur vie par les fatalités de leur chair […]. J'ai cherché à suivre pas à pas dans ces brutes le travail sourd des passions, les poussées de l'instinct, les détraquements cérébraux survenus à la suite d'une crise nerveuse […]. *Ce que j'ai été obligé d'appeler [le] remords [de mes deux héros] consiste en un simple désordre organique, en une rébellion du système nerveux tendu à se rompre. L'âme est parfaitement absente*. (8; emphasis added)

As an example of the experimental method, *Thérèse Raquin* purportedly constitutes the unbiased observation of bodily activity, of the (mal-)function of the protagonists' physiology. This amounts to an ambitious endeavor to subtract all speculation on the soul and moral evil. Given Zola's narrative gesture to shrink the literary study of human behavior to one of flesh and blood, Jean-Louis Cabanès did not exaggerate in stating that "la physiologie zolienne prétend être uniquement 'physiologique'" (*OC* 1: 119). And yet, in this section I contend that Zola's physiological "experiment" finishes by self-imploding. Through the course of the story, the resolutely physiological scope progressively disintegrates as the void left by the eradication of extra-physiological concerns

including the psychological and the numinous creates a vacuum that violently engulfs the narrative's foundation. What fills the black hole that appears at the text's horizon is something uncannily resembling the Christian image of God.

The premeditated murder of Camille, a fragile young man drowned by his wife Thérèse and her lover Laurent, occurs midway through the story. The first half recounts the development of Thérèse and Laurent's affair, their decision to murder Camille, and the fatal act itself. The second half constitutes a lengthy description of the couple's intense physical suffering and mental anguish after they are cleared of suspicion and marry. Their pathology includes intense sensations of heat and cold, paranoia, hallucinations, insomnia, monomania, and symptoms of what many readers would diagnose as depression, including the lack of sexual desire. However, their mental anguish is presented as the result not of a guilt complex but rather of a "désordre organique," in which physiological malfunctioning spreads to the brain: "Ces changements, qui partent de la chair, ne tardent pas à se communiquer au cerveau, à tout l'individu" (8, 159).

The narrative anticipates Camille's murder by providing an elaborate physiological profile that serves as an explanation for Thérèse and Laurent's act of evil. Both characters possess bodies driven by bestial instinct. The narrator likens their physical traits, bodily movements, and instinctual desires to predatory animals, thereby foreshadowing Camille's homicide. Inflecting questions of gender and heredity with common prejudice among mid-nineteenth-century authors concerning women and the Orient, Zola's narrator places stress on Thérèse's feminine nervous system and "sang africain," inherited from her Algerian mother. As for Laurent, his fleshy, blood-tainted, tough skin, his "grosses mains [qui] aur[aient] pu assommer un bœuf," and his "cou de taureau" betray a heightened animalistic instinct and troubling potential for physical violence that he inherited as a "fils de paysan."[1] Zola's message is clear: the body is the agent of destruction. Whereas the narrator subtracts the factor of human will, he lends the body a will of its own: "Tout semblait inconscient dans cette florissante nature de brute; [Laurent] obéissait à des instincts, il se laissait conduire par les *volontés de son organisme.* […] Le sourd travail des désirs s'était opéré en lui, à son insu […]. Il ne s'appartenait plus" (65; emphasis added).

The novel provides an excellent illustration of how the body acquired the role of ultimate signifier in the nineteenth-century literary imagination; it is the place where truth is read. In *Face Value*, Christopher Rivers states with respect to Balzac and Zola that "characters' bodies reveal in some way the truth about them, and it is this truth which governs the narrative" (6). In *Thérèse Raquin*, the extra-diegetic narrator alone can accurately read body types. His physiological readings form a sophisticated analysis of bodily signs that secondary characters either ignore or misinterpret.[2] After Camille's murder, the narrator pursues a thorough examination of curious bodily changes that take place in Thérèse and Laurent: "Il se fit en [Thérèse et Laurent] un travail sourd qu'il faudrait analyser avec une délicatesse extrême […]. Il serait curieux d'étudier les changements qui se produisent parfois dans certains organismes, à la suite de circonstances déterminées" (107, 159). Indeed, the narrator labors to provide for the reader a lesson in the symptomatology of evil by detailing a number of bodily signs as markers of Thérèse and Laurent's guilt in Camille's death, including chills, fatigue, sweat, and change in skin pigmentation.

Despite Zola's and the narrator's insistence, it is difficult for the reader not to interpret such bodily signs as the symptoms of a guilty conscience. In fact, it would seem that Zola's characters display a rich psychological depth that the narrator quite ironically is misreading. On the one hand, the narrator presents the events that lead to Thérèse and Laurent's adultery and act of murder as driven solely by the physiological need for the alleviation of pain. Their repressed sex drive induces physical discomfort, which is relieved only through sexual union at the expense of Camille's murder. The narrative thus leads us to believe that once Thérèse and Laurent are free to marry, their bodily suffering will subside. However, much to our surprise the sexual union that cohabitation affords them by no means lessens their pain. On the contrary, Thérèse and Laurent's physical discomfort only intensifies after marriage.

Zola's claim that the protagonists' behavior and suffering are purely the result of a "désordre organique" is unpersuasive, for after Camille's murder no precise physiological diagnosis is given for Thérèse and Laurent's physical and mental anguish, or for their inability to consummate the marriage on their wedding night. At this midway point in *Thérèse Raquin*, biological determinism's totalizing ideology responsible for a number of inconsistencies and

contradictions at the level of the plot appears to lead to textual implosion. And yet, in the second half of the novel the story suddenly shifts course, as if to rescue itself from its non-compelling biological materialism, or rather to reject a nihilistic vision of human drama destined for self-destruction. It proceeds in fact to establish a redeeming "natural" order that upholds moral values of good and evil, and that ensures just retribution. Paradoxically, it does this by falling back on the very theological notions that its experimental method aimed to foreclose.

Thérèse Raquin portrays as futile any hope for divine retribution. Toward the end of the novel, Camille's mother, who has remained in Thérèse and Laurent's care long after Camille's death, becomes paralyzed, unable to move any part of her body, save her eyes. When through a slip of the tongue, she learns of Thérèse and Laurent's culpability in her son's death, she begins to question God's goodness:

> Elle eût injurié Dieu, si elle avait pu crier un blasphème. Dieu l'avait trompée pendant plus de soixante ans […]. Elle était demeurée enfant, croyant sottement à mille choses niaises, ne voyant pas la vie réelle se traîner dans la boue sanglante des passions. Dieu était mauvais […]. Rien n'existât que le meurtre et la luxure. (195)

Admitting her error in placing faith in a good world and a benevolent God, Mme Raquin takes cognizance of the reality of life as subjected to evil deeds. She becomes completely disillusioned as Camille is not avenged by God: "Le Ciel ne voulait pas que Camille fût vengé" (203). Mme Raquin's loss of faith in the face of evil reflects a logic that, much like what we observed in Baudelaire, takes aim at the premises of theodicy.[3]

Despite the novel's attack on faith in God, the narrative maintains the notion of just vengeance. In the concluding chapters, the body itself becomes the sole source of retribution by assuring a "natural" order of things. The changes in Thérèse and Laurent's physiology in the wake of their crime are recast as a type of retribution for their evil deeds: "[Les souffrances physiques] de leur mariage étai[ent] le châtiment fatal du meurtre" (205). A good example of the body's role as punisher occurs when Laurent attempts to take up the painting of portraits. However, when he notices that each figure resembles Camille, he becomes frightened at the

realization that "[sa] main ne lui appartenait plus […], ses doigts avaient la faculté fatale et inconsciente de reproduire sans cesse le portrait de Camille" (187). Similarly, when Laurent attempts to take control of his brushstrokes, he finds himself at the mercy of his body, the inevitable—or fatal—meter of justice: "Pendant une heure, il se débattait contre la *fatalité* de ses doigts. A chaque nouvel essai, il revenait à la tête du noyé. Il avait beau tenter sa volonté […]. Malgré lui […] il obéissait à ses muscles, à ses nerfs révoltés" (186).[4] The term *fatal*, which appears in numerous passages, suggests a just, if natural, order.

As an eyewitness to the couple's deteriorating physical and mental state, Camille's mother comes to the realization that the body has replaced God as arbiter of justice. While initially she grieved over God's failure to avenge her son's death, she begins to understand that punishment is nonetheless being executed before her eyes, and that Thérèse and Laurent's daily suffering is the fruit of their crime:

> En face des déchirements des meurtriers, devinant la crise qui devait éclater un jour ou l'autre, amenée par *la succession fatale des événements,* [madame Raquin] finit par comprendre que les faits n'avaient pas besoin d'elle. Dès lors, elle s'effaça, *elle laissa agir les conséquences de l'assassinat* de Camille qui devaient tuer les assassins à leur tour […]. Son dernier désir était de repaître ses regards du spectacle des souffrances suprêmes qui briseraient Thérèse et Laurent. (243; emphasis added)

Here, the term *fatale* should be understood according to the word's two senses—death and inevitability—both of which provide the foundation for Zola's naturalism as the orchestration of destruction as well as of order. The passage forecasts Thérèse and Laurent's suicide by presenting death as the final and inevitable act of justice ("les conséquences […] qui devaient tuer"). The use of *fatal* to refer to natural order, death, and inevitability merges in the novel's denouement when inescapable corporeal mechanisms carry out the penalty of death on the couple. Zola would end other novels in similar fashion. In *Nana* (1879), the death of the eponymous *courtisane* is presented as the natural outcome of her dissolute life.[5] In *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893), Antoine Macquart's death by spontaneous combustion is presented as a logical outcome of alcoholism.[6] In the Zolian universe, the demise of "immoral" characters

is the natural, physiological consequence of destructive acts that themselves are physiologically determined.

What is striking about Zola's early novel is that the body serves as the common denominator for all human phenomena. In *Thérèse Raquin*, the body is at once the source of evil and of just retribution. Whereas the portrayal of the body as agent of human (self-)destruction risks unfurling a nihilist literary vision, a second portrayal of the body as figure of vengeance, possessing attributes of both divine wrath and human volition, resists nihilism by restoring order, even a spiritual dimension, to the human condition. Although God and human will are officially absent in *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola's objective to reassure the reader of a natural system of justice that punishes the evildoer closely resembles Christian theology. As Zola's moral order holds characters responsible for their "predestined" (bodily programmed) acts that merit corporeal punishment and even death, the novel presents something along the lines of Jansenism only maladroitly cloaked in a crude form of secularism. Zola's naturalist "theology" is particularly grim, for an order in which evil acts driven by human nature are solely atoned for through human nature itself, presents a vicious cycle with no way out.

It is important to note that in conveying to the reader that Thérèse and Laurent's suffering constitutes a form of punishment, the narrative exhibits a peculiar hybridity of secular and religious modes that instills physiological description with Christian imagery of eternal damnation, particularly hellfire. For example, the intense fevers from which the couple suffers are described through a portrayal of their bedroom as an inferno:

> Un feu clair flambait dans la cheminée, jetant de larges clartés jaunes qui dansaient au plafond et sur les murs. La pièce était ainsi éclairée d'une lueur vive et vacillante; la lampe, posée sur une table, pâlissait au milieu de cette lueur […]. Peu à peu la chaleur était devenue étouffante dans la chambre […]. Par instants, des jets de flammes rougeâtres s'échappaient du bois, et alors des reflets sanglants couraient sur le visage des meurtriers […]. Ils s'aveuglaient à regarder les flammes ardentes, et, lorsque invinciblement ils jetaient un coup d'œil craintif à côté d'eux, leurs yeux, irrités par les charbons ardents, créaient la vision et lui donnaient des reflets rougeâtres. (146–47, 153, 162)

In an even more vivid scene in which the couple experiences intense physical sensations of heat during the night, the narrator

describes their bed as a flaming hell. It is as if the dead Camille were turning over hot coals underneath: "Chaque nuit, le noyé les visitait, l'insomnie les couchait sur un lit de charbons ardents et les retournait avec des pinces de feu" (125–26). In another passage, Zola employs a baroque religious and mystical vocabulary to describe Thérèse and Laurent's marriage: "Ils vivaient dans un *enfer*, se meurtrissant, rendant amer et cruel ce qu'ils faisaient et ce qu'ils disaient, voulant se pousser l'un l'autre au fond du *gouffre* qu'ils sentaient sous leurs pieds" (224; emphasis added). Elsewhere, the narrator describes the couple's hearth as "une fosse commune où grouillaient des morts" (174). While the narrator insists that changes in the murderers' physiology alone account for their sufferings, Zola's experimental study is nonetheless infused with religio-mystical imagery, and illustrates the encounter of two modes of thought—theological and medical—concerning the causes and consequences of evil. The objective to preserve a moral order generates a rather awkward transitional narrative suspended somewhere between the sacred and the profane in which religious concepts are reintroduced in an otherwise highly secularizing text.

God-like figures emerge in *Thérèse Raquin* to further assure the condemnation of evil and just vengeance. The recurring apparition of "accusatory eyes" in many guises conveys the presence of an omniscient, condemning specter. Camille's portrait, which continues to hang in Thérèse's bedroom after the murder, terrifies Laurent with "un regard si écrasant [… qui] le suivait des yeux" (155). The house cat constantly confronts Thérèse and Laurent with "un air dur et cruel […] les examin[ant] avec soin. […] Laurent fut gêné par l'éclat métallique de ses yeux […]. Il crut que le chat allait lui sauter au visage pour venger Camille. Cette bête devait tout savoir: il y avait des pensées dans ses yeux ronds" (156–57). When Thérèse and Laurent pass by the window of a neighboring business, even the merchant's gaze reminds them of their deeds (145). In the most poignant of examples, the paralytic Mme Raquin succeeds in using her only remaining functioning organs—her eyes—to provoke remorse in Thérèse. In something approximating an act of confession, Thérèse in fact kneels before Mme Raquin and, in an attitude of supplication, enumerates her sins (207).

While it is difficult for today's reader not to interpret the abiding presence of accusatory eyes metaphorically as symptomatic of the protagonists' projection of their feelings of guilt (which both Zola in the preface and the narrator dismiss), it immediately

suggests the presence of an omniscient judge. More specifically, it signals the author's condemnatory position, a voice of disapproval that intrudes into the story. By portraying the murderers' suffering as a "châtiment," the narrative would seem to interpret its "scientific experiment" through the lens of a Judeo-Christian moral code that insists that adulterers and murderers must not escape punishment. The concluding scene in which the two protagonists put an end to their pain through suicide exemplifies the hybrid nature of a novel that is both scientific and moralistic in scope. Once Thérèse and Laurent expire, two different figures gaze at the dead bodies. While the narrator, as scientist, provides a brief laboratory-like description, Mme Raquin peers at the evildoers, as if through the eyes of God:

> Les cadavres restèrent toute la nuit sur le carreau de la salle à manger, tordus, vautrés, éclairés de lueurs jaunâtres par les clartés de la lampe que l'abat-jour jetait sur eux. Et, pendant près de douze heures, jusqu'au lendemain vers midi, madame Raquin, roide et muette, les contempla à ses pieds, ne pouvant se rassasier les yeux, les écrasant de regards lourds. (246)

As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings has noted, *Thérèse Raquin* is a novel about expiation, for which "la faute" is atoned through death (*L'Éros* 20). But while "la réparation" is overtly presented as a natural outcome, Zola's "étude physiologique" in fact leads to a final, violent act of wrath in which the narrator, playing the role of God, executes his own protagonists under the guise of dissection. In this last passage, Zola's experiment does not abstain from aiding the evildoers in dying as the twisted bodies of Thérèse and Laurent lay spread out ("vautrés") and fully illuminated on the tile floor that serves as the scientist's work table. Moreover, the eyes of Mme Raquin, as the diegetic figuration of the author's moral position, are in fact described as "crushing" ("écraser") the evildoers. When compared to the conclusion to Baudelaire's "Mademoiselle Bistouri" (see Chapter 2) in which the narrator finds it impossible to imagine a God who permits evil to take place before his very eyes ("Ô Créateur! peut-il exister des montres aux yeux de Celui-là seul qui sait pourquoi ils existent"; *OC* 1: 356), Zola's conclusion seems all the more to rehabilitate the notion of a just and omniscient God.

The manifestation of various God-like figures strongly suggests an abiding attraction to the deity, and in this case the theological

notion of divine retribution. To put this into psychological perspective, I would like briefly to consider Lacan's discussion of atheism in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in the very terms of an unconscious God: "For the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead*—even by basing the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the father—the true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*" (59). By placing this aphoristic statement alongside other important theses of Lacan, Slavoj Zizek elaborates on what the psychoanalyst meant by an unconscious God:

> *The modern atheist thinks he knows that God is dead; what he doesn't know is that, unconsciously, he continues to believe in God*. What characterizes modernity is no longer the standard figure of the believer who secretly harbors intimate doubts about his belief and engages in transgressive fantasies; today, we have, on the contrary, a subject who presents himself as a tolerant hedonist dedicated to the pursuit of happiness, and whose unconscious is the site of prohibitions: what is repressed are not illicit desires or pleasures, but prohibitions themselves. "If God doesn't exist, then everything is prohibited" means that the more you perceive yourself as an atheist, the more your unconscious is dominated by prohibitions which sabotage your enjoyment. (One should not forget to supplement this thesis with its opposite: if God exists, then everything is permitted—is this not the most succinct definition of the religious fundamentalist's predicament? For him, God fully exists, he perceives himself as His instrument, which is why he can do whatever he wants, his acts are in advance redeemed, since they express the divine will…). (91–92; emphasis added)

Lacan's reformulation of Nietzsche's proclamation explains much that underlies the paradoxes of secular thought. By suggesting that God is unconscious, Lacan asserts that we continue to harbor an abiding sense of the divine, which itself is inextricably linked to our inherent psychology of guilt. The absence of the father—and ultimately, God—only exacerbates our sense of culpability, for we are forced to internalize—and repress—moral prohibitions. Zola's narrative constitutes a prime example of the abiding notion of the divine, one that the text does not make explicit and is reluctant to recognize, but which surfaces with ever greater force as the plot unfurls. The awkward transition in Zola's novel from the body as source of evil to the body as avenger of evil can be

most fully appreciated in this light. Whereas the preface and first half of *Thérèse Raquin* presume God's "death," the many uncanny forms of the supernatural that make their appearance in the final chapters bear witness to the underlying "unconsciousness" inspiring the story. Zola's unconscious God indeed takes the form of an implicit moral code of which the many references to the Christian tradition form the symptoms.

The novel's curious treatment of "le mal" demonstrates a seemingly unconscious narrative drive to endow physiological phenomena with moral significance, and exhibits a subliminal sense of transgression that upholds moral prohibitions. On the one hand, in an effort to empty evil of moral substance, the text uses the signifier "mal" to refer primarily to physiological ailments:

> Le nom de maladie, d'affection nerveuse était réellement le seul qui convînt aux épouvantes de Laurent. Sa face se convulsionnait, ses membres se roidissaient; on voyait que les nerfs se nouaient en lui. Le corps souffrait horriblement, l'âme restait absente. Le misérable n'éprouvait pas un repentir; la passion de Thérèse lui avait communiqué un *mal* effroyable, et c'était tout. (160; emphasis added)

In this example, "le mal" is described as a physical illness. Later in the passage, the word *mal* appears five more times, once more alone, and four times as a prefix in "malade," "maladive," "malaise," and "maladroite" (161–62). In the subsequent chapter, *mal* appears in the expression "le haut mal"—epilepsy[7]—to describe the nervous spasms that afflict Thérèse and Laurent. However, at other times "le mal" becomes inadvertently implicated in questions of morality, employed in reference to a specific act of wrongdoing rather than a physical state of being. For instance, in his discussion of Thérèse's infidelity, the narrator states: "[Thérèse] trouvait une volupté amère à tromper Camille et madame Raquin; […] elle savait qu'elle faisait le mal" (61). In this case, "le mal" refers to Thérèse's adultery and her betrayal of Camille and Mme Raquin's trust. It does not invoke physical pain or mental anguish since no one is suffering physically or otherwise during the affair (the unsuspecting Camille and his mother remain content in their daily lives). Rather, Thérèse's behavior is portrayed as evil in relation to an implicit moral code.

What is most noteworthy is when the narrator's use of "le mal" draws from two different understandings of "le mal" simultane-

ously. In reference to the murderers' physical suffering in the weeks after their marriage, the text states: "Ils sentaient que le mal était incurable, qu'ils souffriraient jusqu'à leur mort du meurtre de Camille" (205). This quote illustrates the encounter of physiology and morality in the analysis of the lovers' pathology. The first half of the sentence describes "le mal" in medical terms as "incurable," as if it were an illness. However, the second relative clause, which explains that Laurent and Thérèse suffer from their act of murder, lends moral significance to their suffering. It would appear then, that they suffer both physically and mentally, as a result of their recognition of the immoral nature of murder. The narrative's ambivalence toward "le mal," and more specifically its slippage from a physiological to a moral notion, is certainly exacerbated by the ambiguity of the French noun *mal,* which may refer simply to physical or mental suffering, or denote a religious or philosophical idea of wrongdoing, ungodliness, immorality, and fault or sin. As an instance of textual hybridity, Zola's novel alternates between both meanings. Most significantly, this return to a theological understanding of "le mal" unveils the face of God as the unconscious subtext.

The secularization of evil in *Thérèse Raquin* proves to be grossly totalizing in its attempt to eliminate all but the physiological. As a consequence, the text becomes all too vulnerable to a type of textual implosion, or "a falling back" on the support of theological concepts to provide a sense of natural order. The resort to an implicit moral code, to the figuration of God-like judges, and to the theological concept of divine retribution only poorly concealed, demonstrates the difficulty of an abrupt and definitive break from a religious or transcendent understanding of the human condition. Lacan's notion of God as the unconscious internalization of divinely proscribed prohibitions helps us to perceive this psychological disposition toward an implicit moral code as one that governs the subconscious text of naturalist fiction. Also, the novel's reduction of moral character to bodily phenomena ignores what the modern reader would consider as a source of their "retribution"—their own guilt complex. In sum, the totalizing nature of the novel's vision of evil ignores factors of human psychology that seem all too evident. *Thérèse Raquin* demonstrates that a compelling secular perspective on evil need recognize the complexity of human behavior. But it also shows that theological frameworks may continue to inform even the most obstinately secular

reformulations of the human condition, and can be attributed to an unconscious psychic disposition toward the divine that Lacan identified as characteristic of our secular age. But *Thérèse Raquin* may also be informative in suggesting that recourse to the religious functions to counter the unsettling potential of a resolutely physiological understanding of the human condition. We will pursue this theory in a discussion of literary sublimation.

Sublimation in Zola

Not unlike the subtext of the unconscious God, the sublimation of fictional writing both accounts for seeming inconsistencies in—and in fact succors the process of—secularization. Generally speaking, what I mean by sublimation is the conveying of a sense of grandeur and harmony to what we initially apprehend as the brute and chaotic nature of human experience. In Zola's narratives, this has the effect of imparting a numinous dimension to an otherwise secularizing perception of the human condition. More specifically, literary sublimation serves as a crucial compensatory mechanism to offset the negative affects that accompany the apprehension of a godless world. Both Kant and Freud describe the sublime as an experience in which something uncanny or overwhelming that threatens the subject's perceived boundaries of its being triggers a psychic defense mechanism against the affect of anxiety. In Zola, sublime figuration responds to the disarming affects of destructive bodily drives, and to the overwhelming void at the heart of nihilism's vision of a godless universe, by transmuting them into forms of transcendence. This transmutation occurs most often through the appropriation of religious themes and symbols. Accordingly, sublimation constitutes the paradox of the naturalist novel as the vehicle of compensation that surmounts material reality.

In *The Critique of Judgment,* Kant forges a notion of the sublime in which a seemingly boundless object of nature incites the mind to imagine infinity in a single intuition. In contrast to the beautiful, whose appeal is immediately apparent, an object that prompts the sublime is one that possesses mystery and ineffability. It can often be perceived as an "abyss" in violently threatening the self's sense of integrity:

> In presenting the sublime in nature the mind feels *agitated*, while in an aesthetic judgment about the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a vibration, i.e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object. If a thing is excessive for the imagination (and the imagination is driven to such excess as it apprehends the thing in intuition), then the thing is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself. (115)[8]

In its failure to imagine an object of nature adequately, the self enlists reason in an effort to resist "sensible annihilation." Kant clarifies that the self's experience of the sublime is not the natural object itself, "but the attunement that the intellect gets through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment" (106). In the passage from "agitation" to "restful contemplation," reason converts a negative affect into a positive one as it derives pleasure through its assertion of the concept of infinity and a deeper appreciation of one's self. As Walter A. Davis explains, Kant presents the sublime as a "transformation and displacement of experience: […] by shifting from affect to attunement with the 'mental' nature of the latter enabling a smooth transition to reason and the 'feeling' that we have 'a supersensible power within'" (54). Davis eloquently summarizes Kant's theory as "a systematic picture of how a mentalistic hyperconsciousness superimposes itself on an experience that shatters every assumption which that hyperconsciousness needs in order to sustain itself" (54). An end result of the sublime experience is one that upholds a moral universal order. As Davis explains in following Kant,

> We become aware of a supersensible power within us—Reason—which offers us an order of concepts that establish the proper way to feel about the sublime so that the primary result of its experience will be respect for the moral law and the rational order within. We thus traverse the greatest distance, moving from the experience of wrenching discordances to the one thing that can satisfy the ratio—a confirmation of our rational identity and its power to provide the guarantees adequate to the mastery of any experience. In its full yield, Kant's hermeneutic circle is transformed into

> that feeling of inner contemplative calm that is required to keep the critical philosophy firmly in place as the only inner ordering of the mind that is coherent and moral. (55)

In *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud places Kant's elaboration of the sublime experience in psychoanalytic terms. Freud coined the term *sublimation* as the most productive of defense mechanisms because it redirects libidinal drives toward socially useful achievements, such as art or scientific discoveries. As the libido's direct satisfaction can be deleterious to society, sublimation assures civilization by protecting the individual against nature, namely, his own base instincts:

> Every civilization must be built up on coercion and renunciation of instinct. […] There are present in all men destructive, and therefore antisocial and anticultural trends. […] The decisive question is whether and to what extent it is possible to lessen the burden of the instinctual sacrifices imposed on men, to reconcile men to those which must necessarily remain and to provide a compensation for them. (*The Future of an Illusion* 7)

> The task here is that of shifting the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world. In this, sublimation of the instincts lends its assistance. One gains the most if one can sufficiently heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work. When that is so, fate can do little against one. A satisfaction of this kind, such as an artist's joy in creating, in giving his fantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms. At present we can only say figuratively that such satisfactions seem "finer and higher." (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 79)

In his interdisciplinary work on the dialogic relationship between philosophical, religious, and psychoanalytic understandings of the sublime, Clayton Crockett argues that in elaborating his theory of sublimation Freud has in fact identified "the source of the Kantian sublime as the estrangement of the ego from itself at its most basic and familiar level. […] The Kantian sublime thus passes into the Freudian unconscious, and reappears, most explicitly and powerfully, in the sense of the uncanny that disturbs conscious thinking from inside" (35).

In modern literature, the abiding allure of an existentially threatening "other"—perceived either as an exterior force or as a part of the self—occasions moments of psychic sublimatory compensation. As we will see, the many "abysmal" images that appear in Zola's narratives trigger feelings of anxiety as the mind becomes aware of the chaos, disorder, and destruction at the root of existence. For the naturalist text to sustain itself, it must work to cover the abyss, so to speak, by transmuting it into images of transcendence that more often than not draw from religious traditions and theological concepts. In each example, my observations will underscore both an anxiety-producing image of violence, destruction, or disorder that threatens the narrative's integrity, and the insertion of compensatory images that gain mastery over the natural other.

For Zola, the encroaching abyss often takes the form of the female body that incarnates a predatory, "castrating" sexuality.[9] In *Nana*, the eponymous *courtisane* poses as a striking figure of the abyss. Portrayed as evil, she wreaks havoc in the established patriarchal social order through her ability to entice men above her class. Accordingly, she enjoys a position of power as a corrupting force in a social milieu that struggles to "contain" her. The following passage features an arresting depiction of the affects of anxiety that Nana triggers in the male onlooker. Here Muffat, a devout Catholic, perceives the *courtisane* as a figure of terror that threatens his sense of existential integrity:

> Muffat la contemplait. Elle lui faisait peur. Le journal était tombé de ses mains. Dans cette minute de vision nette, il se méprisait. C'était cela: en trois mois, elle avait corrompu sa vie, il se sentait déjà gâté jusqu'aux mœlles par des ordures qu'il n'aurait pas soupçonnées. Tout allait pourrir en lui, à cette heure. Il eut un instant conscience des accidents du mal, il vit la désorganisation apportée par ce ferment, lui empoisonné, sa famille détruite, un coin de société qui craquait et s'effondrait. Et, ne pouvant détourner les yeux, il la regardait fixement, il tâchait de s'emplir du dégoût de sa nudité. […] Il songeait à son ancienne horreur de la femme, au monstre de l'Ecriture, lubrique, sentant le fauve. Nana était toute velue, un duvet de rousse faisait de son corps un velours; tandis que, dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis profonds, qui donnaient au sexe le voile troublant de leur ombre, il y avait de la bête. C'était la bête d'or, inconsciente comme une force, et dont l'odeur seule gâtait le monde. Muffat regardait toujours,

> obsédé, possédé, au point qu'ayant fermé les paupières, pour ne plus voir, l'animal reparut au fond des ténèbres grandi, terrible, exagérant sa posture. Maintenant, il serait là, devant ses yeux, dans sa chair, à jamais. (*Rougon-Macquart* 2: 1270–71)

In this dense passage, the *courtisane*, whom Muffat beholds as the epitome of the *femme fatale*, acquires the dimensions of a ferocious beast emerging from a dark abyss ("au fond des ténèbres"). At first transfixed, Muffat subsequently closes his eyes, terrified that Nana's ever-expanding posture and animality will engulf him. This figure of transgression is perceived as spoiling, corrupting, poisoning all that is around her to the point that Muffat begins to see himself—even the entire world—as thoroughly contaminated. In a similar passage, the narrator describes Nana's onstage performance as petrifying her male onlookers:

> Un frisson remua la salle. Nana était nue. Elle était nue avec une tranquille audace, certaine de la toute-puissance de sa chair. […] C'était Vénus naissant des flots n'ayant pour voile que ses cheveux. Et, lorsque Nana levait les bras, on apercevait, aux feux de la rampe, les poils d'or de ses aisselles. Il n'y eut pas d'applaudissements. Personne ne riait plus, les faces des hommes, sérieuses, se tendaient, avec le nez aminci, la bouche irritée et sans salive. Un vent semblait avoir passé très doux, chargé d'une sourde menace. Tout d'un coup, dans la bonne enfant, la femme se dressait, inquiétante, apportant le coup de folie de son sexe, ouvrant l'inconnu du désir. Nana souriait toujours, mais d'un sourire aigu de mangeuse d'hommes. (*Rougon-Macquart* 2: 1118)

The spectacle of Nana exerts an unequivocally "castrating" effect on the male audience. Her sex's "*coup* de folie" and the sharpness ("aigu") of her smile constitute trenchant weapons that threaten to cut into and consume the masculine crowd.

In both passages, the male spectator's perception of the *courtisane* as an overwhelming "natural" object sets the stage for the sublime experience. Indeed, Nana possesses seemingly infinite dimensions that disturb the sense of self. The inability to immediately intuit the infinity of the object, the impotence to "tame" Nana, so to speak, instills in the male onlooker both attraction and repulsion. But whereas at the level of plot male anxiety dominates, another layer of the text works to "contain" the negative

affects that accompany the face of destruction. The extra-diegetic narrator labors to reduce male anxiety, seemingly contradictorily, through the mythical aggrandizement of the female prostitute.[10] Bertrand-Jennings has already described Nana's performance in the above passages as nothing less than a mythical rendition of the *courtisane* as both the Roman empress Messalina, renowned for her destructive sexual appetite, and the praying mantis ("Trois visages" 123). Furthermore, Nana's portrayal as Venus emerging from the sea, and her description as "la femme" *tout court*, endow her with universal or epic proportions. More specifically, they place her within the Western narrative tradition on feminine desire.

In Zola's dramas, woman often plays the traditionally biblical role of tempter and appears as an avatar of the arch-temptress, Eve, responsible for the vice of men.[11] The mythification of (feminine) destruction that accompanies anxious descriptions of the evil figure amounts quite simply to a "stylization" of the threatening other. Using Kant's words, we could say that the passage's intertextual references provide a framing effect that serves as an "esthetic judgment" of sorts in allowing the text's male consciousness to reconsider the feminine source of agitation from a position of "restful contemplation." This stylization involves the spiritualization or "sacralization" of material reality that can already be considered a compensatory transformation for the male psyche. To demarcate the threatening other as "evil," to situate it in an epic story of humanity, is to resist psychic annihilation, and constitutes Reason's endeavor to dodge the abyss. As Kristeva has described it in *The Powers of Horror*, sublimation is about taming through the naming of that which has no name: "*Sublimation* […] is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. […] Through sublimation, I keep it under control" (11).

As much scholarship has pointed out, modern society and the human body in *Les Rougon-Macquart* are governed by destructive forces. And yet, the more complete portrayal of the human condition in these narratives does not submit to a nihilist perspective of life as solely material or void of meaning. To recover meaning, to transcend the nauseating disorder of Being, to endow the phenomenological world with natural harmony, Zola grounds his stories in myths that effectively expand theories of sexuality, heredity, sociology, and economics to a scale of mythical grandeur.

Most notably, Zola co-opts the biblical notion of the Fall of Man by attributing the human vice afflicting the Rougon-Macquart family line to ancestral—even prehistoric—sins. In his description of what he calls "une anthropologie mythique," Jean Borie asserts:

> Zola se réfère souvent, obscurément, à un épisode premier, de scénario d'ailleurs incertain, mais dont l'influence déterminerait encore, avec plus ou moins de force, la conduite de ses personnages. Cette anthropologie mythique repose sur une Chute, un péché originel, informulable et vague. (*Zola* 43)

The notion of an evil nature transmitted through heredity recurs throughout Zola's fiction, and is overtly featured in *La Bête humaine* (1890) in which the violent nature of Jacques Lantier's sex drive is diagnosed as a trait inherited from his progenitors:

> Chaque fois, c'était comme une soudaine crise de rage aveugle, une soif toujours renaissante de venger des offenses très anciennes, dont il aurait perdu l'exacte mémoire. Cela venait-il donc de si loin, du mal que les femmes avaient fait à sa race, de la rancune amassée de mâle en mâle, depuis la première tromperie au fond des cavernes? (*Rougon-Macquart* 4: 1044)[12]

As the above quote suggests, Zola preserves the biblical notion of Original Sin as, at root, a feminine betrayal.[13]

The translation of anxiety over destructive bodily drives into dark myth is accompanied by a second compensatory move not so much to contain as to channel these same drives toward the positing of an overarching social order through images of *creation*. This type of sublimation, following Freud and Kant, most clearly involves the transformation of a negative affect (anxiety) into a positive one, such as power or transcendence, and fits neatly within the parameters of Zola's faith in historical progress. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this type of sublimation is the symbol of the locomotive in *La Bête humaine*, named *La Lison*. A textbook example of Freudian sublimation, Jacques's devotion to his career as a train mechanic and driver involves the channeling of destructive sexual urges toward useful ends. In his study of the novel, Borie makes the important observation that Zola's father was an engineer, and that in poems composed during his adolescence, Zola figured his father as an architect who tamed the universe: "Le désir

de François Zola, imaginé par son fils, est de mater cette virilité sauvage de la vierge nature, de canaliser ce torrent trop libre, trop turgide, de transformer l'amazone en épouse" (*Zola* 79). Along the lines of the Œdipus complex, Jacques's sublimation of destructive sexual drives involves a subconscious identification with the father, which Borie describes as the "dieu caché" of Zola's novels, and another example of Lacan's "unconscious God." But this identification entails the taming of the female "monster." While for Jacques, *La Lison*, as a feminized locomotive, serves to redirect his destructive sexual urges toward productive ends, at the level of the narrative the locomotive, as a "vehicle" that domesticates human sexuality's raw energy, becomes a symbol of scientific progress:

> C'était vrai, il l'aimait d'amour, sa machine, depuis quatre ans qu'il la conduisait. […] S'il l'aimait celle-là, c'était en vérité qu'elle avait des qualités rares de brave femme. Elle était douce, obéissante, facile au démarrage, d'une marche régulière et continue, grâce à sa bonne vaporisation. On prétendait bien que, si elle démarrait avec tant d'aisance, cela provenait de l'excellent bandage des roues et surtout du réglage parfait des tiroirs; de même que, si elle vaporisait beaucoup avec peu de combustible, on mettait cela sur le compte de la qualité du cuivre des tubes et de la disposition heureuse de la chaudière. […] Il l'aimait donc en mâle reconnaissant, la Lison, qui partait et s'arrêtait vite, ainsi qu'une cavale vigoureuse et docile; il l'aimait parce que, en dehors des appointements fixes, elle lui gagnait des sous, grâce aux primes de chauffage. Elle vaporisait si bien, qu'elle faisait en effet de grosses économies de charbon. […] La nuit tombait, Jacques redoublait de prudence. Il avait rarement senti la Lison si obéissante; il la possédait, la chevauchait à sa guise, avec l'absolue volonté du maître; et, pourtant, il ne se relâchait pas de sa sévérité, la traitait en bête domptée, dont il faut se méfier toujours. Là, derrière son dos, dans le train lancé à grande vitesse, il voyait une figure fine, s'abandonnant à lui, confiante, souriante. (*Rougon-Macquart* 4: 1128–32)

Through a description of Jacques's imagination, this narrative passage harnesses the archaic violence and internal fire of human desire, as incarnated by the female beast, into a relatively docile feminine machine that also happens to turn a financial profit. In *Le Romancier et la machine*, Jacques Noiray qualifies this transformation as "une conversion bénéfique" in which the brute force of nature is "ramenée à la mesure de l'homme, apprivoisée,

silencieuse et lumineuse" (505). The locomotive symbol fuels the myth of Progress, which affords a means of transcendence that projects outward from an otherwise purely immanent frame. As Roger Ripoll states in *Réalité et mythe chez Zola*, it would seem that in such passages of domestication, a pessimistic (or "agitated") Zola haunted by the irrational and death is overshadowed by an optimistic Zola, a believer in Progress (828).[14]

In countering the chaotic forces of nature and society, Zola most often falls back on the biblical myths of Paradise and of messiah. His utopian gardens and Christ-like figures appear vividly in works devoted to the capitalism of Second Empire France, notably its exploitation of human labor and the emergence of huge enterprises that destroy small businesses. Brute or unfettered capitalism, perceived as fueled by destructive economic forces, is recurrently portrayed through a hellish description of huge machines of labor and retail. The coal mines of *Germinal* (1885), as a depiction of capitalist exploitation of the working class, are described as a devouring abyss whose indulging appetite consumes the workers in their daily descent:

> La cage avait reparu, de son mouvement aisé et sans fatigue. [Le mineur] s'y accroupit avec des camarades, elle replongea, puis jaillit de nouveau au bout de quatre minutes à peine, pour engloutir une autre charge d'hommes. Pendant une demie heure, le puits en dévora de la sorte, d'une gueule plus ou moins gloutonne, selon la profondeur de l'accrochage où ils descendaient, mais sans un arrêt, toujours affamé, de boyaux géants capables de digérer un peuple. Cela s'emplissait, s'emplissait encore, et les ténèbres restaient mortes, la cage montait du vide dans le même silence vorace. (*Rougon-Macquart* 3: 1154)

This anxious description of the coal miners' abyss conveys above all an abiding threat of annihilation as the miner's body, tiny in stature, descends into the giant bowels of the earth, described in terms of darkness ("les ténèbres"), silence, emptiness ("le vide"), and death. The passage inflicts the reader with a nauseating vertigo as the cage's movements continue without respite, plunging down the mineshaft and re-emerging again and again, as it "feasts" on the working class.

The terrifying image of the mine is later mitigated by a description of Le Tartaret, a smoldering land formed by the coal mine's

burning vapors. The name itself reminds the reader of Tartarus, one of the Greek references for hell in the Christian scriptures. Unsurprisingly, it serves as an illustration of eternal suffering in the miners' imagination:

> Le Tartaret […] était une lande inculte, d'une stérilité volcanique, sous laquelle, depuis des siècles, brûlait une mine de houille incendiée. Cela se perdait dans la légende, des mineurs du pays racontaient une histoire: le feu du ciel tombant sur cette Sodome des entrailles de la terre, où les herscheuses se souillaient d'abominations; si bien qu'elles n'avaient pas même eu le temps de remonter, et qu'aujourd'hui encore, elles flambaient au fond de cet enfer. Les roches calcinées, rouge sombre, se couvraient d'une efflorescence d'alun, comme d'une lèpre. Du soufre poussait, en une fleur jaune, au bord des fissures. La nuit, les braves qui osaient risquer un œil à ses trous, juraient y voir des flammes, les âmes criminelles en train de grésiller dans la braise intérieure. Des lueurs errantes couraient au ras du sol, des vapeurs chaudes, empoisonnant l'ordure et la sale cuisine du diable, fumaient continuellement. (*Rougon-Macquart* 3: 1395)

In this unmistakably hellish allegory of the devastating consequences of the exploitation of human labor, there are hints of compensatory transformation. To begin, the allegorization of capitalist machines through references to biblical symbols of judgment (Tartarus, Sodom, "enfer") instills the narrative with a sense of spiritual order. Legend has it that God executed judgment on this site of exploitation in smiting the land with fire. Second, the mine's vertiginous "agitation" is assuaged by Le Tartaret's presentation of "still life" with its charred rock, its volcanic sterility. Finally, a striking botanical register provides images of transcendence. The calcified land forms what the narrative describes as yellow flowers, and its charred earth blooms with alum ("une efflorescence d'alun"). The conversion of sterile rock into flowery elaborations eventually leads to the description of a stretch of land commonly called la Côte-Verte, which "miraculously" emerges from Le Tartaret as a paradise on earth:

> Et, ainsi qu'un miracle d'éternel printemps, au milieu de cette lande maudite du Tartaret, la Côte-Verte se dressait avec ses gazons toujours verts, ses hêtres dont les feuilles se renouvelaient sans cesse, ses champs où mûrissaient jusqu'à trois récoltes.

> C'était une serre naturelle, chauffée par l'incendie des couches profondes. Jamais la neige n'y séjournait. L'énorme bouquet de verdure, à côté des arbres dépouillés de la forêt s'épanouissait dans cette journée de décembre, sans que la gelée en eût même roussi les bords. (*Rougon-Macquart* 3: 1395–96)

This utopian description of an earthly paradise shielded from even the harsh effects of winter exposes a narrative strategy that mitigates the otherwise overwhelming anxiety induced by the novel's apocalyptic portrayals of the coal mines. This corroborates A. J. Evenhuis's understanding of la Côte-Verte as an actual Zolian myth of nature's cyclical, regenerative pattern, inflected with Christian symbolism. He argues that the myth possesses a "comforting" effect, and stands as a "fortress against death" (107).

Similar to the description of the coal mines in *Germinal*, the steel factory of Zola's *Travail*, appropriately named "Abîme," is portrayed as a voracious monster-machine that devours life itself:

> Luc regardait l'Abîme. […] Sous la fuite éperdue des nuages de deuil, l'Abîme étendait l'amas sombre de ses bâtiments et de ses hangars. C'était le monstre, poussé là, qui avait peu à peu élargi les toits de sa petite ville. […] On entendait la danse violente et acharnée de deux martinets qui battaient là comme le pouls même du colosse, dont les fours flambaient à la fois, dévorateurs de vie. (2–4)

The anxious perception of high capitalism in nineteenth-century France as a devouring economic machine governed by unruly nature under the shadow of death itself is immediately mitigated in this very passage through estheticization. The narrative's denotation of the steel factory as a monster involves first an apprehension of the abject, and then the move to thrust it aside through mythical aggrandizement. The passage also psychically tames the factory labor by reconfiguring it in terms of the art of dance measured in rhythmic beats. The economic other that threatens society with obliteration is especially offset by a messianic character who, as Brian Nelson points out, is the product of the narrative's "impulse towards order" (74). Luc Froment, the ultimate Christ-figure of *Travail* who saves humanity from the destructive drives of brute capitalism, is prefigured in the image of the tamed machine that he comes to admire in the factory appropriately named *La Crècherie*:

> La masse noire du haut fourneau se dressa. Il était de très antique modèle, il n'avait guère que quinze mètres de hauteur, lourd et trapu. Mais, peu à peu, on l'avait entouré de perfectionnements successifs, d'organes nouveaux qui finissaient par faire, autour de lui, comme un petit village. […] Et le monstre disparaissait ainsi sous la complication des aides qu'on lui donnait […]. Et pas un cri, pas un flamboiement, une obscure et calme besogne. (153–54)

This passage enacts a "taming of the beast," in which, through a series of "perfectionnements successifs," workers transform an amorphous, heavy "black mass" into a civilized entity; its monstrous shrieks and blazes convert into a "calme besogne."

Inspired by the productive potential of *La Crècherie*, Luc purchases the factory from his friend Jordan as the foundation of his mission to establish a socialist utopia in which working conditions are humane, and capital is evenly distributed. It is an understatement to say that *Travail* constitutes a socialist allegory of Christ's life. To start, "Jordan," which evokes the Gospel story of Jesus's baptism, and the *Crècherie*, the French word that refers to the crib of the infant Messiah, firmly anchors the narrative in the Christian tradition. The novel contains numerous passages that cast Luc as a savior-figure whose acts of self-sacrifice redeem the world from looming apocalypse. A central passage of the novel in which the majority of the town rises up against Luc in defense of the old familiar system of exploitation and misery amounts to a rewriting of the passion of Christ. Luc's trial is described as a "calvaire," and although he wins the judge's favor, he continues to draw scorn from the townspeople, who spit on him during his long and winding "via dolorosa" home from the courtroom (274, 282–84). *Travail* is the celebration of a Christ-like figure with a mission to rescue the poor from despair, who demonstrates great compassion even for those who curse him, and eventually achieves success in founding a city based on brotherly love and productive work. The forces of destruction are rivaled by those of work, progress, and health. In his preparatory notes for *Travail*, Zola makes a direct reference to his intent to sublimate ("glorify") human labor as the means to combating social ills:

> Il est au contraire un honneur, une noblesse, le plus précieux des biens, la joie, la santé, la force, l'âme même du monde, qui

> toujours est en labeur, en création du futur. C'est du travail que l'enfant mis au monde, c'est du travail que la vie vécue normalement, sans perversion imbécile […]. Et la misère, le crime social abominable, disparaîtra, dans cette *glorification du travail*, dans cette distribution entre tous de l'universelle tâche, chacun ayant accepté sa part légitime de devoirs et de droits.[15]

Scholars have established that the blatant utopianism of Zola's late work constitutes a significant thread linking the early novels as well. We have already observed the nature and machine symbolism of *La Bête humaine* and *Germinal* that express hope for a future in which humanity will tame destructive forces and bring about social justice. Of all the *Rougon-Macquart* volumes, Zola's utopianism is perhaps most evident in *Au Bonheur des dames* (1883). The Parisian department store, much like the coal mines of *Germinal* and the steel factories of *Travail*, threatens civilization with annihilation. Described as both machine and beast, it expands mercilessly over entire city blocks in driving out small businesses.[16] Octave Mouret, the entrepreneur-owner of the department store, is cast as a god-like figure who continually surveys from "on high" (in second- and third-floor interior balconies) the store's rapid physical growth, its success in enticing the customers, and its steady cash flow. Once Octave's energy and drive are complemented with—even "harnessed by"—Denise Baudu's moral responsibility and social purpose through marriage, the text's latent Messianism becomes manifest and foreshadows *Travail*'s utopianism.[17] In the last novel of the *Rougon-Macquart* series, the narrative finally seems to take cognizance of its underlying Messianism by borrowing an unambiguous biblical vocabulary. Philip Walker notes that the final pages of *Le Docteur Pascal* express hope in a bright future by casting Clotilde

> as a kind of new Virgin Mary nursing her baby and musing on the role he might be called upon to play: "L'enfant était venu, le rédempteur peut-être. Les cloches avaient sonné, les rois mages s'étaient mis en route […]." And in the final page of the novel, she prays to her own child as if he were indeed the new Christ."A l'enfant qui allait être demain, au génie qui naissait peut-être, au messie que le prochain siècle attendait, qui tirerait les peuples de leur doute et de leur souffrance! […] Dans les temps troublés, on doit attendre les prophètes." (218)

In summarizing Zola's fiction, Valerie Minogue asserts that "Zola seems to have transformed Christian beliefs into a mythology based, nonetheless, quite as firmly on good and evil, heaven and hell, and on the heroic endeavour in the midst of monsters, as Dante's cosmology in the *Divina Commedia*" (219). For the purposes of our study, we can state that sublimation in Zola eventually redeems the world as Christian mythification gives cosmic coherence to the plots of family intrigue, and empowers the individual in his struggle with natural evil. In the end, Zola's official atheism remains balanced by overarching, biblical myths that, by spiritualizing the human condition, convey a sense of universal harmony.

Zola's narratives are complex to say the least in that their intention to reduce all human phenomena to questions of physiology is matched by the equally significant impulse to elevate the human condition to mythical status and place it within a quasi-religious frame. The drama of Zola's narratives is played out time and again between the positing of a brute natural world, and its re-spiritualization through mythification and symbolization. Whereas Zola's self-proclaimed intent as a writer was to devote himself to a project of secularization that would reveal the bare truth of humanity in the absence of metaphysical "illusions," his refusal to jettison meaning itself and his desire for order engage in a perennial dialogue between science and religion that proves to be a more accurate description of his secularizing project. As such, Zola's novels in fact steer clear of a purely materialist and pessimistic portrayal of the human condition within a strictly immanent frame. A comparison in the next section of Zola and Huysmans will allow us to consider as essential to secular vision the sustained engagement in religious themes.

Huysmans's Conversion as Sublimation

Kristeva has described the act of writing itself as the "ability to imagine the abject" and subsequently, through sublimation, "to thrust it aside" (16). But what happens in the case of Huysmans, who labored to deny sublimation? In stark contrast to Zola, the resolutely materialist vision at the core of Huysmans's fiction is not compensated by the mechanisms of sublimation. This would

align with scholars' observations that the writer subscribed to the naturalist method of direct observation and its underlying "subtraction" ideology even more resolutely than Zola. Henry Céard described Huysmans's *Les Sœurs Vatard*, as "une des œuvres les plus sincères de l'école naturaliste […]. M. Huysmans se tient beaucoup plus près de la réalité que le grand maître du naturalisme, M. Émile Zola" (Cogny 58). But in light of the writer's later conversion to Catholicism, the satisfaction of the desire[18] for transcendence in Huysmans appears not so much absent as delayed. The drive to spiritualize, as if psychically repressed, eventually surfaces in dramatic fashion in the form of conversion from a disenchanted immanent philosophy to a mystical vision of transcendence.

Huysmans's admiration for the founder of the naturalist movement was no secret. Following the publication of Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877), Huysmans composed a series of four articles to defend the novel against a wealth of criticism. As Robert Baldick states, Huysmans's articles became "one of the first important manifestos of the Naturalist movement" (39). Two years later, Huysmans dedicated to Zola *Les Sœurs Vatard*, signed by "son fervent admirateur et dévoué ami" (43). Zola in turn published a laudatory review of the novel, which he described as simply "a human document" (Baldick 44). Although Huysmans began his career as Zola's disciple, there are striking differences between the two writers' versions of naturalism. Unlike Zola's fiction, Huysmans's by and large lacks metaphysical references and is void of mythological frameworks. Instead of crafting texts in which disturbing natural phenomena are sublimated, Huysmans provided categorically pessimistic and wholly materialist portrayals of the human condition. Works such as *Marthe* (1876), *Sac au dos* (1877), *Les Sœurs Vatard* (1879), and *À vau-l'eau* (1882) present a resolutely bleak outlook that is neither redeemed nor mitigated through estheticization or religio-mythical thematization. Huysmans's grim portrait of a prostitute in *Marthe*, although in agreement with Zola's depictions of the female nervous system's heightened sensibility and (self-)destructive nature, does not sublimate the eponymous character through monstrous aggrandizement nor does it refer to an "original sin" that can be traced to a pre-historic, mythic event. And at no point does the novel present a compensatory character representative of life-affirming grandeur. Huysmans's study of one woman's life of ill-repute remains largely anchored in the imme-

diate present with few references to the protagonist's childhood. Much of the narrative details Marthe's pessimistic outlook:

> Elle n'hésitait déjà plus à se donner, elle attendait une occasion propice. D'ailleurs, la vie qu'elle menait lui était insupportable. Ne jamais rire! Ne jamais s'amuser! […] Elle allait alors à vau-l'eau, mangeant à même ses gains de hasard, souffrant le jeûne quand la bise soufflait. […] Encore qu'elle bût jusqu'à en mourir, pour oublier l'abominable vie qu'elle menait. (22, 24, 28)

Here, the expression "aller à vau-l'eau"—"to head downstream"—summarizes Marthe's destiny and serves as a metaphor for the destructive nature of life. In another passage, Marthe speaks candidly to a lover in comparing her life to an indelible stain of mud: "Tu as ramassé une traînée de boue, mon cher! et tu sais, on a beau se décrotter, il en reste toujours, ça revient comme la tache d'huile sur les étoffes!" (58). With this self-portrait, the text's strictly immanent depiction of the prostitute eschews any means of transcendence. Void of the chance of redemption, Marthe's life is summarized from a thoroughly materialist point of view as a simple alternation of luxury and misery. Lest the reader entertain hope, the narrator dispassionately concludes with the prostitute expiring in her own desolation: "Admettons encore une alternance de richesse et de misère et ce sera tout; elle finira dans une crise d'ivrognerie ou se jettera, un jour de bon sens, dans la Seine" (100). Unlike Zola's portrayal of Nana, Huysmans's Marthe is cast as a sympathetic protagonist. Consequently, her death provides neither relief nor the reaffirmation of social order but instills further despair.

Similar observations can be made of *Sac au dos*, a short story that recounts the experiences of a soldier in the Franco-Prussian war. This resolutely pessimistic outlook on war deplete of heroism bears witness to the battlefield's barbarity and uselessness. One of the novel's first reviews denounced its uncompromising realism that strips war of its glamour, by presenting it solely in the terms of grime and dysentery (Baldick 51). In the novel's anti-climax, the narrator retreats to his home as the sole consolation for a meaningless and hostile world:

> Je retourne chez moi pour me coucher! Je retrouve mon logement tel que je l'ai laissé. Je le parcours, radieux, puis je

> m'assieds sur le divan et je reste là, extasié, béat, m'emplissant les yeux de la vue de mes bibelots et de mes livres. […] Je saute sur le sommier qui bondit, je m'enfouis la tête dans la plume, mes yeux se ferment, je vogue à pleines voiles dans le pays du rêve. […] Je me dis qu'il faut avoir vécu dans la promiscuité des hospices et des camps pour apprécier la valeur d'une cuvette d'eau, pour savourer la solitude des endroits où l'on met culotte bas, à l'aide. (*Marthe … Sac* 140)

The narrator's escape from the cold outer world only to "take cover" under his bed sheets accentuates *Sac au dos*'s nihilism. Rather than sublimating the hostile world that surrounds him, the narrator further enhances it through contrast with an entirely fictitious "pays du rêve."

Fundamental differences between Zola's and Huysmans's naturalism are even more salient in *À vau-l'eau*. This acutely pessimistic novel recounts the existential crisis of M. Folantin, a middle-aged bachelor of the lower middle class whose misfortunes provide an illustration of life's absurdity. In the naturalist vein, the novel constitutes the study of a social type whose destiny is determined by socio-economic forces and a particular psycho-physiological disposition. *À vau-l'eau* is extreme in stripping life of elements of spiritual or redemptive meaning, and concludes by affirming the axioms of Schopenhauerian pessimism:

> [M. Folantin] embrassa d'un coup d'œil l'horizon désolé de la vie; il comprit l'inutilité des changements de routes, la stérilité des élans et des efforts; il faut se laisser aller à vau-l'eau; Schopenhauer a raison, se dit-il, "la vie de l'homme oscille comme un pendule entre la douleur et l'ennui"; aussi n'est-ce point la peine de tenter d'accélérer ou de retarder la marche du balancier; il n'y a qu'à se croiser les bras et à tâcher de dormir. (143)

The futility of living is conveyed here in the gesture of crossing one's arms, the image of a desolate horizon, and the expression once again of "aller à vau-l'eau," a metaphor of man's inevitable downward path toward existential annihilation. As in the conclusion to *Sac au dos*, the only form of escape from life's hostilities is sleep.

Critics and scholars have made the common observation that Huysmans's fiction, by wallowing in the decrepitude of its own descriptions, is characteristically deplete of spiritual or moral value.

According to a critic of *Le Gaulois*, *Marthe*'s naturalism lacks any sentiment of the heart, and refrains from moralizing: "De la première à la dernière page de cette plaquette prestigieuse, l'œil seul est intéressé. Le cœur n'est pas pris une minute. L'auteur est un peintre, un graveur à l'eau-forte, un photographe; mais il n'est pas ému, il ne veut, il ne peut émouvoir. On voudrait au fond de cet observateur, trouver un moraliste. Et il faut se contenter d'un plastique et d'un érotique" (Cogny 47). Although Huysmans's contemporaries including Zola and Henry Céard admired *À vau-l'eau* as a serious work, recent scholarship has been tempted to interpret the novel's prevailing pessimism as comical caricature. As C. G. Shenton states: "Carried to the extreme, the vision of the irremediable banality of life brings the novelist almost inevitably to a comic treatment of plot and character. They are conceived as images of the absurdity of existence, and as such, they become caricatural" (303). Eléonore Roy-Reverzy draws a similar conclusion in stating that Huysmans's depictions of life's utter meaninglessness radically diverge from Zola and border on the burlesque:

> Dans un monde où le sens fait défaut, ne reste à l'écrivain que le rire, rire burlesque et négateur, souvent grinçant, qui n'a plus vocation à ordonner et à tirer, mais qui exhibe le désordre: en cela l'écriture miniaturiste de Huysmans s'écarte radicalement de l'effort zolien pour endiguer le flot du réel, et le roman lui-même renonce à dire le monde, trop occupé à en constater l'insupportable vacuité. (42)

With *À vau-l'eau*, Huysmans's naturalism reached a threshold or turning point that, as Roy-Reverzy suggests, could have led to a psychic disposition bordering on madness and characterized by bouts of uncontrollable laughter. Instead, the novels that followed unveil the beginning of an undeniably marked progression toward a spiritualization of thought, a sacralization of worldview, and eventually a Christianization of human experience. It is as if the author's thoroughly secular vision rendered him vulnerable to the ever surmounting psychological need to fill the spiritual black hole of the text. It is ironic, though comprehensible, that whereas Zola, who never failed to incorporate religious themes in his novels, remained throughout his career fairly consistent with his avowed atheism, Huysmans, whose early novels were resolutely materialist, eventually converted to Catholicism.

In *À Rebours* (1884)*, En rade* (1887), and especially *Là-bas* (1891), Huysmans demonstrates a keen interest in the numinous. Although he continues to follow the naturalist approach of the extensive research and documentation of a segment of society, each novel's drama involves a narrator wavering between a solely materialist perception of reality and a mystical one. *À Rebours*, a work whose title is indicative of a turn from "nature," concludes with the recluse esthete Des Esseintes reciting a version of the skeptic's prayer: "Seigneur, prenez pitié du chrétien qui doute, de l'incrédule qui voudrait croire, du forçat de la vie qui s'embarque seul, dans la nuit, sous un firmament que n'éclairent plus les consolants fanaux du vieil espoir!" (349). In light of this conclusion that points toward a desire to believe, it comes as no surprise that after reading *À Rebours* Barbey d'Aurevilly predicted that Huysmans would one day choose between "la bouche d'un pistolet [et] les pieds de la croix." Similarly, Léon Bloy interpreted Des Esseintes's misanthropic personality as a masked "clamoring for a God" (qtd. in Baldick 91). In *J.-K. Huysmans: De l'écriture à l'Écriture*, Cogny underscores the "oscillations" at the heart of Des Esseintes's psychology between Schopenhauerian pessimism and the hope for something beyond the material, but which Huysmans himself was not fully aware of at the time: "Il y aurait chez des Esseintes […] ce système d'oscillations d'un pôle à l'autre, qui se devine à la lecture d'*À rebours*, mais dont Huysmans semble bien ne s'être rendu compte de façon claire que vingt ans après" (95).

Huysmans's curiosity for the numinous is made evident in the very first chapter of *Là-bas*. Durtal, the writer-progatonist, explains to a companion his interest in pursuing a new form of naturalism that explores the spiritual dimension of existence:

> Il faudrait, se disait-il, garder la véracité du document, la précision du détail, la langue étoffée et nerveuse du réalisme, mais il faudrait aussi se faire puisatier d'âme, et ne pas vouloir expliquer le mystère par les maladies des sens; le roman, si cela se pouvait, devrait se diviser de lui-même en deux parts, néanmoins soudées ou plutôt confondues, comme elles le sont dans la vie, celle de l'âme, celle du corps, et s'occuper de leurs réactifs, de leurs conflits, de leur entente. Il faudrait, en un mot, suivre la grande voie si profondément creusée par Zola, mais il serait nécessaire aussi de tracer en l'air un chemin parallèle, une autre route, d'atteindre les en deçà et les après, de faire, en

> un mot, un naturalisme spiritualiste; ce serait autrement fier, autrement complet, autrement fort! (31)

Huysmans's literary inquest into spiritual matters well surpasses the place of religion in Zola's works and represents a definitive break with the strict materialism of naturalist fiction. In the first pages of *Là-bas*, Durtal and his companion discuss their shared opinions about naturalism's limitations:

> Ce que je reproche au naturalisme, ce n'est pas le lourd badigeon de son gros style, c'est l'immondice de ses idées; ce que je lui reproche, c'est d'avoir incarné le matérialisme dans la littérature […]. Vouloir se confiner dans les buanderies de la chair, rejeter le suprasensible, dénier le rêve, ne pas même comprendre que la curiosité de l'art commence là où les sens cessent de servir!
>
> —Mâtin, tu y vas, toi, répondit Durtal, d'un ton piqué. Il ralluma sa cigarette, puis: le matérialisme me répugne tout autant qu'à toi […] Toute l'école naturaliste, telle qu'elle vivote encore, reflète les appétences d'un affreux temps. Avec elle, nous en sommes venus à un art si rampant et si plat que je l'appellerais le cloportisme. Puis quoi? Relis donc ses derniers livres, qu'y trouves-tu? Dans un style en mauvais verres de couleur, de simples anecdotes, des faits divers découpés dans un journal, rien que des contes fatigués et des histories véreuses, sans même l'étai d'une idée sur la vie, sur l'âme qui les soutienne. (27–29)

In retrospect, Huysmans explained that his journey to God began through an interest in the supernatural qualities of evil: "C'est par la vision du surnaturel du mal que j'ai eu d'abord la perception du surnaturel du bien" (qtd. in Baldick 216). Through his research into the satanic circles of nineteenth-century Paris, Durtal proffers a haunting description of the historic figure of Gilles de Rais, and acquires a heightened awareness of sin and guilt. Beginning with *Là-bas*, Huysmans's writing—under the guise of the satanic—becomes unequivocally invested in the mystical. The naturalist vision of "le mal," the "abject" world of meaninglessness and human suffering, becomes infused with a sense of the numinous. Accordingly, the banality of "le mal" acquires the mystical grandeur of "le Mal." In describing the novel, Huysmans states: "Je prépare un livre dans lequel je veux faire *en opposition au matérialisme abject de ce temps*, une étude sur le satanisme moderne, *montrer qu'[…] un type*

grandiose du mal peut encore exister" (qtd. in Cogny 131; emphasis added). And it is through this interest in evil's grandeur that the reflections of Huysmans's protagonist turn to questions of theodicy. Of special interest for Durtal is the theological concept of "la substitution mystique," which endows our physical and mental torment with meaning by contending that the sufferings of fervent believers may be offered to God in exchange for the afflictions of others.[19]

If we are to believe Huysmans himself, and follow scholars' interpretation of the subsequent novel, *En route* (1895), as largely autobiographical, the writer's conversion to Catholicism took place shortly after the completion of *Là-bas*. As Durtal explains in *En route*, he woke up one morning, and without knowing exactly how, he believed: "Il n'y a pas eu de chemin de Damas, pas d'événements qui déterminent une crise; il n'est rien survenu et l'on se réveille un beau matin, et sans qu'on le sache ni comment, ni pourquoi, c'est fait" (21). In light of Huysmans's developing interest in the spiritual that forms the literary trajectory of previous novels, Havelock Ellis has described the writer's conversion as "the sudden emergence into consciousness of a very gradual process" (199). As recounted in *En route* and subsequent novels, Huysmans's embrace of Catholicism led him to monastic retreats, confession, communion, and the official title of oblate.

Unsurprisingly, the first post-conversion text of *En route* unfurls a transcendental vision of the human experience. This new outlook first becomes manifest as Durtal listens to hymns sung during liturgy. In synesthesiac descriptions that merge sound and sight, the children's voices evoke images of whiteness ("blancheurs d'aube") and of the Virgin Mary ("la compatissante image de la Vierge passant"; 5, 7). For Durtal, the vocal melodies translate into sound the impressive architecture of cathedrals and constitute the immaterial expression of medieval Christian art (10). Accordingly, Durtal becomes haunted ("hanté") by Catholicism itself, drunk on its atmosphere of incense and candle wax. Its music entrances Durtal ("pour jamais capté"), penetrating him to the bone ("jusqu'aux mœlles"; 19, 29). He perceives church vaults as containing an actual soul formed by the ever resounding echoes of the medieval faithful's fervent prayers (36).

During a spiritual consultation, the Abbot Gévresin diagnoses Durtal's appreciation of sacred art as the very vehicle of his con-

version: "L'art a été le principal véhicule dont le Sauveur s'est servi pour vous faire absorber la foi" (79). In effect, the protagonist senses God's presence in the esthetic experience of the Catholic Mass: "Il semble qu'après toutes les lamentations du *De profundis* et du *Dies irae*, la présence de Dieu qui vient, là, sur l'autel, apporte un soulagement et légitime" (15). In apprehending the divine, Durtal is repeatedly moved to tears: "C'est le Saint-Esprit, se dit Durtal, malade, ébloui, les larmes aux yeux" (206). And at the moment of absolution in which Christ is believed to make his presence felt, the penitent loses his faculty of speech and weeps (239). He entertains visions of divine effigies during the Eucharist and imagines the Virgin dancing to the vibrations of the church organs (68, 97). As the priest elevates the monstrance, Durtal envisions the Holy Spirit passing through the congregation (98). And in his search for the deity, Durtal senses his being wholly invaded, as if divinely possessed: "c'est bien moins lui qui s'avançait dans l'inconnu, que cet inconnu qui l'envahissait, le pénétrait, s'emparait peu à peu de lui" (107). In adopting a mystical vision of the universe, Durtal begins to interpret daily incidents as "signs." To take but one example, in looking for confirmation that he is spiritually ready for communion, Durtal perceives as a heavenly sanction the rehabilitation of his mentor priest who had taken ill and who regains his health just in time to perform Mass. Beginning with *En route*, and more fully elaborated in *La Cathédrale* (1898) and *Les Foules de Lourdes* (1906), everything becomes symbol.

In several regards, conversion in *En route* presents itself as the vehicle of sublimation. This is most evident if we bear in mind the Freudian definition as the channeling of aggressive, sexual impulses toward productive or socially acceptable aims. Durtal's conversion is in fact prefigured as the sublimation of his impulses for sexual gratification with women. Whereas the image of a woman named Florence continues to tempt Durtal to submit to the desires of the flesh, the act of prayer is presented as a veritable reinvestment of the libido. Faced with the affects of anxiety that accompany his obsession with the female body and the experience of compelling sexual drives, he attempts to regain self-control by seeking spiritual advice from the Abbot Gévresin:

> Ce fut l'obsession par la pensée, par l'image, par tout, la hantise d'autant plus terrible qu'elle se spécialisait, qu'elle ne s'égarait pas, qu'elle se concentrait toujours sur le même point; la figure

> de Florence, le corps, le gîte même des ébats avoués s'effaçaient; il ne restait plus devant lui que *l'obscure région* où cette créature transférait le siège de ses sens.
>
> Durtal résistait, puis, affolé, prenait la fuite, essayait de se briser par de grandes marches, de se distraire par des promenades, mais l'ignoble régal le suivait quand même dans ses courses, s'installait devant lui au café, s'interposait entre ses yeux et le journal qu'il voulait lire, l'accompagnait à table, se précisait dans les taches de la nappe et dans les fruits. Il finissait, après des heures de luttes, par échouer, vaincu, chez cette fille, et il en partait, accablé, mourant de dégoût et de honte, sanglotant presque. […]
>
> Il continua de se vautrer chez elle, puis il eut, pendant quelques jours, une telle révolte de ce servage, qu'il se hissa hors de l'égout et reprit pied.
>
> Alors il parvint à se récupérer, à se réunir, et *il se vomit*. Il avait un peu délaissé, pendant cette crise, l'abbé Gévresin auquel il n'osait avouer ces turpitudes; mais, présageant, à certains indices, de nouvelles attaques, il s'apeura et s'en fut le voir. (102; emphasis added)

Here, the female sex and male sexual desire appear as abject. Haunted by the feminine body's "obscure région" that, like an abyss, engulfs everything in close proximity ("la figure de Florence, le corps, le gîte même des ébats avoués s'effaçaient"), and then disgusted ("mourant de dégoût") by his overwhelming sexual appetite, Durtal proceeds in a single impulse both to vomit himself ("il se vomit") and to set off to visit the priest. Along the lines of Kristeva's understanding of abjection, Durtal's vomiting constitutes a form of self-preservation. Regarding the psychology of the vomiting ego, Kristeva states: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*. […] During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (3). Vomiting, for Durtal, provides the visceral prelude to Durtal's religious conversion as the ultimate act of self-(re)constitution in the face of the abject.

In his spiritual preparation for confession and conversion, the image of the "monstrous" Florence all but dissolves as Durtal focuses his attention on the Catholic Mass: "Ce monstre de Florence […] ne s'approche plus, elle demeure dans la pénombre et la fin du Pater, le 'Ne nos inducas in tentationem' la met en fuite" (150). In fact, Durtal asks himself whether his newfound faith is the mysti-

fication of his base instincts: "Il flottait, comme une épave, entre la luxure et l'Eglise […] et il en venait à se demander s'il n'était pas victime d'une mystification de ses bas instincts cherchant à se ranimer, sans même qu'il en eût conscience, par le cordial d'une piété fausse" (39). Durtal is right to suspect a profound relationship between his turn to religion and his sexual appetite. As Kristeva has argued, sublimation constitutes the psychic reflex of the ego's sense of the abject: "[When] the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime" (11). The relationship established in *En route* between sexual drives and religion can be further illuminated by Kristeva's notion of abjection:

> The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the *animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder. (12–13)

In light of Kristeva's observations, I consider religious conversion in *En route* to be the mind's way of purifying itself from its own primitive animalism. However, it should be noted that the penitent's self-perception as abject, the psychic disposition necessary for conversion, is not rooted uniquely in the specific boundaries of sexual appetite. Rather, the sinner perceives his entire soul as blackened, soiled, filth; it is an inner shadow that overwhelms him, a "danger" that threatens his sense of being:

> Peu à peu, une intuition inexpliquée d'un péril qui le menaçait lui vint. Ainsi qu'une bête qui flaire un ennemi caché, il regarda avec précaution en lui, finit par apercevoir un point noir à l'horizon de son âme et, brusquement, sans qu'il eût le temps de se reconnaître, de se rendre compte du danger qu'il voyait surgir, ce point s'étendit, le couvrit d'ombre. (286–87)

Biographers including James Laver and Robert Baldick have read Huysmans's novels as largely autobiographical, Durtal as the author's double, and the religious sentiment expressed in later works as sincere reflections of a converted soul.[20] However, some of Huysmans's contemporaries and scholars of recent times have doubted the legitimacy of the author's conversion, judging it to be

"merely a matter of an exacerbated sensibility and an artistic dilettantism."[21] In *Huysmans l'inchangé*, Marc Smeets has suggested that it is wrong to apply the notion of conversion to the case of Huysmans. Smeets bases his argument on a certain model of conversion, which, following the examples of the apostle Paul, Saint Augustine, and Pascal, involves a complete rupture with one's lifestyle and manner of thinking.[22] Smeets argues that "la conversion est rupture et elle ne peut être que cela," whereas Huysmans's entire opus illustrates not rupture but continuity, both in thought and esthetics (31). If Huysmans "converted," it was essentially for literary purposes, to search for something new to write about:

> L'œuvre de Joris-Karl Huysmans (surtout à partir d'*À Rebours*) s'inscrit dans une sorte de quête de l'absolu et dont chaque livre porte les empreintes. Qu'il s'agisse de fleurs artificielles, de tableaux primitifs ou des stigmates de la Sainte: toutes ces choses s'inscrivent dans une continuité, elles appartiennent à un ensemble thématique organisé. […] La conversion de J.K. Huysmans a l'air d'être le résultat d'une quête essentiellement littéraire. […] Il explore le terrain littéraire pour trouver du nouveau. (168, 209)

I believe that Smeets's argument is unconvincing on several accounts. To begin, the intent of his argument, as expressed above, is to establish continuity among all of Huysmans's novels, thereby undermining the notion of "two" Huysmans: one who authored pre-conversion novels, and another, post-conversion novels. And yet, the parenthetical remark severely weakens his argument. By stating that the continuity of Huysmans's work is especially the case starting with ("à partir de") *À Rebours*, Smeets sections off as different the first half of the author's literary production. But more significantly, Smeets's adherence to what I would consider pre-modern models of converts oversimplifies the psychological dynamics of conversion, especially in the modern era, conditioned by the forces of unbelief. To examine the notion of rupture in conversion, I would like to consider briefly William James's research on the psychology behind conversion as well as Charles Taylor's notion of cross-pressures.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James suggests that those most susceptible to convert to a religious ideology suffer from a case of the "divided self" or "discordant personality."[23]

The pre-converted mind manifests as "a battle-ground for what [it] feels to be two deadly hostile selves, one actual, the other ideal" (143). Prior to conversion, the mind works in a state of imbalance, investing conscious thought in reflection on a single totalizing worldview at the expense of other forms of perceived reality that remain firmly suppressed. Conversion resolves this imbalance by embracing a vision that overcomes the discord. The pre-conversion mindset often fosters an "oppressive mood" in denying all sense of a sympathetic universe and in cultivating feelings of insecurity through the recognition of a "decaying and failing world" (45–47). Once converted, idealism, often in the form of religious sentiment, takes dominance: "Religious aims form the habitual centre of [one's] energy," and the feelings of insecurity in the face of life's absurdity yield to joy and a sense of harmony (162, 200–01). Accordingly, for James conversion does not entail so much a "rupture" in which the self categorically abandons his old self, as it involves the reconciliation of contradictory and often subconscious forces within the psyche.

If we understand the gradual shift in Huysmans's fiction from nihilist materialism to mysticism as occasioned by a vehement form of secularism that had initially suppressed the notion of the numinous, we can expect to find symptoms of this suppression in the early texts. Indeed, in the early texts affinities for the numinous can be detected in latent or embryonic form, and justify the discussion of continuity between the pre-conversion and post-conversion writings. Despite the profound secularity of Huysmans's first narratives, the desire for a supernatural experience is expressed, though rarely, and in a way that is quickly contained and negated. Such is the case toward the end of *À vau-l'eau*, when Folantin receives a letter informing him of the death of his last living relative. This unexpected death triggers feelings of regret for the loss of faith in God:

> Il envia sa vie calme et muette et il regretta la foi qu'il avait perdue. Quelle occupation que la prière, quel passe-temps que la confession, quels débouchés que les pratiques d'un culte! —Le soir, on va à l'église, on s'abîme dans la contemplation et les misères de la vie sont de peu; puis les dimanches s'égouttent dans la longueur des offices, dans l'alanguissement des cantiques et des vêpres, car le spleen n'a pas de prise sur les âmes pieuses. Oui, mais pourquoi la religion consolatrice n'est-elle faite que

> pour les pauvres d'esprit? Pourquoi l'Église a-t-elle voulu ériger en articles de foi, les croyances les plus absurdes. Je ne puis cependant admettre, ni la virginité d'une accouchée, ni la divinité d'un comestible qu'on prépare chez un fabricant de pâtes, se disait-il; enfin, l'intolérance du clergé le révoltait. Et pourtant le mysticisme pourrait seul panser la plaie qui me tire. […] Ah! La tante Ursule a dû mourir sans regrets, persuadée que des allégresses infinies allaient éclore! (131–32)

In this complex interior monologue, Folantin reminisces over the joys and comforts of his childhood faith. However, this nostalgia for the religious is psychically contained as the protagonist quickly relegates them to a non-recoverable past. Furthermore, his thoughts abruptly turn to Christian dogma, which reason dismisses as absurd. And yet, he admits that "le mysticisme" alone can cure his depression. Folantin's reflections end by simultaneously envying his aunt's comfort through faith in God, and distancing himself from this faith by asserting that he himself cannot be duped into believing the nonsense of Catholic tenets. Above all, in staging the conflict in Folantin's thoughts on religion, this passage serves as an illustration of James's notion of the divided self. In *J.-K. Huysmans: De l'écriture à l'Écriture*, Cogny's assessment of the early Huysmans as a multifaceted figure, traversed by simultaneous and irreconcilable visions accurately captures James's description of the discordant personality prone to conversion (95).

In highlighting the narrator's feelings of ambivalence toward religion, the above passage suggests an underlying imbalance that would eventually find resolution in later novels. In the years following his conversion, Huysmans himself reinterpreted the novels written after *À vau-l'eau*, especially *À Rebours* and *Là-bas*, as marked by signs of his search for the divine.[24] Our interpretation of the passage in *À vau-l'eau* also corroborates Borie's general commentary on Huysmans's opus in *Huysmans: Le Diable, le célibataire et Dieu* that his pre-conversion works testify to an implicit interest in religious matters. Borie interprets the titles *À vau-l'eau*, *À Rebours*, *En rade,* and *Là-bas* as references to a quest or "pilgrimage," and as proof of a marked, if circuitous, development of a spiritual search. The need for the religious, in Huysmans, was always present as the aspiration for a more harmonious existence (18–19).

In the convert's reconciliation of conflicting forces within the psyche, James identifies two important characteristics of the ego's

state of assurance, shared among accounts of conversion that we can recognize in Huysmans's protagonist. This state of assurance involves (1) "the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the *willingness to be*, even though the outer conditions should remain the same," and (2) a sense of "newness [that] beautifies every object" (*Varieties* 201–02). In *En route*, Durtal expresses an unquantifiable happiness, a "dilatement" of the soul, and embraces a new vision of his surroundings that appear to him in fresh radiance:

> Sa vision de la nature se modifia; les ambiances se transformèrent; ce brouillard de tristesse qui les voilait s'évanouit; l'éclairage soudain de son âme se répercuta sur les alentours. Il eut cette sensation de dilatement, de joie presque enfantine du malade qui opère sa première sortie, du convalescent qui, après avoir traîné dans une chambre, met enfin le pied dehors; tout se rajeunit. Ces allées, ces bois qu'il avait tant parcourus, qu'il commençait à connaître, à tous leurs détours, dans tous leurs coins, lui apparurent sous un autre aspect. Une allégresse contenue, une douceur recueillie émanaient de ce site qui lui paraissait, au lieu de s'étendre ainsi qu'autrefois, se rapprocher, se rassembler autour du crucifix, se tourner, attentif, vers la liquide croix. […] Durtal regardait, transporté. Il avait envie de crier à ce paysage son enthousiasme et sa foi. Il éprouvait enfin une aise à vivre. L'horreur de l'existence ne comptait plus devant de tels instants qu'aucun bonheur simplement terrestre n'est capable de donner. (314)

Such a description of the intense experience of conversion helps explain not only the dedication of Huysmans's later works to Christian mysticism, but also his decision to become a Church oblate. Durtal's conversion is accompanied by feelings of spiritual plenitude and incomparable joy ("cette sensation de dilatement, de joie") and engenders an altogether new outlook on his surroundings as nature transforms into manifestations of the divine:

> Et au-dessus […] le ciel entr'ouvrit son tabernacle de nuages, en sortit un clair soleil semblable à une monstrance d'or en fusion, à un saint sacrement de flammes. C'était un salut de la nature, une génuflexion d'arbres et de fleurs, chantant le vent, encensant de leurs parfums le Pain sacré qui resplendissait là-haut, dans la custode embrasée de l'astre. Durtal regardait, transporté. Il avait envie de crier à ce paysage son enthousiasme et sa foi; il éprouvait enfin une aise à vivre. (314)

The vivid sense of rebirth does not, however, preclude the recent convert from experiencing a recurring, even relentless, crisis of doubt toward the legitimacy of his conversion or the existence of God. That Durtal continues to express skepticism from time to time in addition to "worldly temptations" does not nullify his conversion. In fact, the ongoing challenge that contemporaneous discourses of unbelief pose to persons of faith may be what makes conversions modern in late nineteenth-century France. The uniqueness of the *fin de siècle* as a time dominated by two equally dominant worldviews made it impossible to feel secure within a system of thought without feeling one's position threatened, and a strong sense of being pulled, by the other. Taylor speaks in general terms of the fact that in the modern era, the existence of an alternative mind frame "fragilizes" one's own position:

> People in each of these contexts [people of both religious and secular frames of mind] are aware that the others exist, and that the option they can't really credit is the default option elsewhere in the same society, whether they regard this with hostility or just perplexity. The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering. (556)

Taylor pursues his line of thought by explaining that in modern society, traversed by competing "construals," the self feels more "cross-pressured" than assured. Accordingly, "religion remains ineradicably on the horizon of areligion; and vice versa" (592). Whereas scholars opposed to accepting as genuine Huysmans's conversion base their conclusion on, among other things, an ongoing struggle with his faith, Chapter 4 will look more in-depth at what makes this struggle a defining characteristic of modern forms of religious and secular ways of thinking.

How shall we understand the differences outlined in this chapter between Zola and Huysmans? I hope to have shown that a crucial difference between Zola's naturalism and Huysmans's lies in Zola's inclusion of religious concepts through sublimation on the one hand, and Huysmans's elimination of all metaphysical references to portray the essence of life simply in its material manifestation on the other. Although both versions of naturalism constitute projects of secularization, can we account for the fact that Zola's project spanned the length of his long and prolific liter-

ary career, whereas Huysmans's morphed into a seemingly opposing project of sacralization? While I intend to problematize this question, I will first attempt to answer it as it is currently phrased. It would seem in fact that sublimation of vicious chaos perceived as the essence of the human experience guarded the Zolian narrative from self-destruction. From this perspective, Zola's underlying atheism sustained itself by attending to the psychic need to feel connected to something greater than ourselves, by imbuing the material environment with a sense of the numinous. Taylor's commentary on the place of Kant's notion of the sublime in the history of Western thought proves apt for our understanding of Zola. According to Taylor, the sublime became one of the central categories of esthetics in the eighteenth century precisely because, at a time marked by the emergence of the self-reflexive individual and the disenchantment of the world, people felt the need to aspire to something beyond the drastically shrinking and increasingly material universe. As Taylor describes it, the moral meaning of the sublime constituted a reaction to the shallowness of anthropocentrism (343). If there is indeed a genuine human need to aspire to something greater than the self, then we can understand the place of the sublime in Western thought as serving the same function as belief in God.

On the other hand, the thorough suppression of the spiritual in Huysmans's early narratives appears as the symptom of what James described as the "divided self," which, in the absence of sublimation, could only be overcome through conversion. Accordingly, suppressed religious sentiment resurfaces at a psychic threshold to form part of a new world vision. As John E. Smith explains in paraphrasing James, "religious conversion means that religious beliefs previously dormant or merely peripheral now become central and dominant."[25] This is precisely the case with Huysmans who, like so many French writers of the time, enjoyed a Catholic upbringing. As we have already noted, the protagonist of *À vau-l'eau*, as Huysmans's fictional double, relived the comforting memories of his childhood faith as an instinctual reflex to an encounter with (his aunt's) death. This psychic threshold signals a moment in time when the ego can no longer tolerate a direct (or non-sublimated) confrontation with evil and the abject. In the end, the transformation of Huysmans's secularization project into a mystical reinterpretation of the natural world, juxtaposed with Zola's relatively

self-sustaining secularizing vision suggests that the mind's ongoing engagement in questions of the religious serves a necessary function in the elaboration of an enduring secular mind frame.

But hasn't the study of sublimation and conversion in Zola and Huysmans partially undermined the distinction commonly made between religious and secular thought, and that my question above takes for granted? We have considered the literary and psychic function of sublimation in Zola as, in essence, the "conversion" of affect from a negative to a positive pleasure, a spiritualization that reaffirms the ego's sense of integrity in the face of threatening forces. Correspondingly, we have spoken of conversion in Huysmans's fiction largely in terms of the "sublimation" of disturbing affects or perceptions of self and other by channeling them toward the adoration of a deity. By treating sublimation and conversion as illustrations of each other, ultimately I have proffered a rapprochement of religious and secular writing. In performing the same function of transforming negative affect into positive affect, or in Ramazani's words, "fear into triumph, matter into spirit, mobility and chaos into fixity and order," religious and secularizing literatures illustrate homologous human experiences (43).

Chapter Four

The Staging of Doubt

Zola and Huysmans on Lourdes

The previous chapter considered sublimation and religious conversion as analogous psychic reactions to unruly nature. The godless world of the naturalist's literary vision is immediately experienced as an encroaching abyss that threatens the ego with existential destruction. Through compensatory mechanisms engaged to avert sensible annihilation, the ego purifies the universe and reconstitutes itself as an individual being. As part of an ongoing dialogue with the religious, in both Huysmans and Zola "mobility and chaos are converted into fixity and order," and the abject into beauty (Ramazani 43). The sublime secreted by the narrative's psychology as a defense against the threatening Other "causes us to sparkle" (Kristeva 16).

But what happens when, for the believer, the threatening Other takes the precise form of the prevailing discourses of atheism? Or conversely, when a contemporary revival of religious sentiment overwhelms the naturalist? In late nineteenth-century France, when the opposing belief systems of Catholicism and naturalism reached an apex, they inevitably posed inexorable challenges to each other. The assumption made in this chapter is that the uniqueness of France's *fin de siècle* as traversed by equally dominant worldviews made it impossible to write from within a system of thought without concomitantly feeling one's position threatened by, and a strong sense of attraction to, the other ideology. Charles Taylor's description of different moments in modern history as characterized by the "fragilization" of belief systems by rival mind frames especially applies to Zola and Huysmans's time:

> People in each of these contexts [both religious and secular frames of mind] are aware that the others exist, and that the option they can't really credit is the default option elsewhere

> in the same society, whether they regard this with hostility or just perplexity. The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering. (556)

In modern societies marked by the mutual fragilization of opposing belief systems, citizens feel more "cross-pressured" than assured. Inhabiting an "open space," the ego finds itself being pulled in opposite directions.[1] Accordingly, for the modern mind, religion looms in the shadows of unbelief, and vice-versa. Rather than understanding our secular age as the gradual sloughing off of religious thought and sentiment, Taylor describes it as traversed by endless cross-pressures that make it impossible to hold unwavering conviction in a single ideology. Faith is inevitably accompanied by doubt.

Both structurally and conceptually speaking, Taylor's description of cross-pressures bears a striking resemblance to Kant's notion of the sublime and Freud's theory of sublimation. In all three instances, compensatory mechanisms work to convert negative affect into positive affect. In their discussion of sublimity (see Chapter 3), both Freud and Kant uncover a psychic transmutation of negative pleasure into positive pleasure, of a disturbing yet compelling other into images of harmony, order, and ultimately transcendence. In the notion of cross-pressures, the naturalist and the believer alike feel simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the opposing ideology. The rival ideology would not, in fact, appear threatening if it were not in some way compelling. The ego experiences its attraction to the other ideology as a threat precisely because it presents a formidable challenge to the mind's worldview. It weakens the self's sense of integrity, for the ego's self-perception is inextricably entangled in the belief system that it has embraced, and through which it perceives the world. In this chapter, I will argue that to exit this destabilizing space of cross-pressures, the self must engage in the act of recommitting itself to its worldview; it must labor to re-convince itself of its vision of things. Withdrawing from the "open space" often amounts to a "leap of faith" that affords the ego a positive pleasure. Taylor alludes to this leap of faith in which exiting the space involves an "anticipatory confidence […]. Our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it" (550).

Zola's naturalism and Huysmans's Catholic mysticism read as traversed by an open space of cross-pressures. As each ideology becomes "fragilized" due to the challenges posed by its rival, Zola's secularism and Huysmans's faith bear a striking resemblance to each other in two significant ways. First, the modern text exhibits signs of an attraction-repulsion relationship with the opposing ideology, not unlike the ego's two-fold psychic reaction to a natural "other" according to Kant and Freud. Second, the authors engage in what I would call "anticipatory" writing, which reasserts the integrity of an *a priori* vision of the world. Both Zola and Huysmans stage a "crisis in faith" with a predetermined end result of validating their system of thought. At the core of this staging lies a putative working through of one's position on the coexistence of God and human suffering. Or rather, the doubt that becomes the narratives' central drama demands a resolution that reconfirms their preconceived position in the theodicy debate. And yet, this "staging of doubt" is not solely a narrative ploy; it also belies a genuine crisis in worldview.

Writers under the influence of cross-pressures understandably deviate from their own interpretation of the world. Whether deliberately or subconsciously, they entertain the possibility of "the other side." Even if only momentarily, the modern text exhibits fissures that allow it to stretch beyond the parameters of its system of thought. In the case of a mystic such as the late Huysmans, this involves imagining a godless or "disenchanted" universe, which can lead to depression. For positivist narratives, this means considering the possibility of the supernatural, or at least of hidden forces still unexplainable by science. The idea that there is an unknown, invisible realm supporting the material world proved quite "enchanting" even to Zola.

But in taking cognizance of the opposing ideology, the writer especially feels interpellated by the other side to defend his official position. Consequently, *fin-de-siècle* narratives resemble a philosophical proof for one—and against another—system of thought. Because cross-pressures fragilize the naturalist and Catholic paradigms, religious and secular writers alike take up the pen to convince themselves of their mind frame. Accordingly, writing proves to be an act of faith, a Pascalian wager on their vision of things. As a corollary, writing becomes self-prophesizing—or self-fulfilling—a performance that stages the act of mustering

evidence for its presumptive religious or secular persuasion. In Zola and Huysmans, this performance involves enlisting questions of theodicy to parry the cross-pressures of the opposing ideology. For this reason, the writers do not treat evil as a source of inquiry, but enlist polarizing accounts of evil and the existence of God to validate their belief system. In constructing narratives that rehash established discourse on theodicy, writers reassert themselves as a naturalist or as a fervent Catholic.

In order to describe with some adequacy the complex nature of late nineteenth-century literary texts at the crossroads of the religious and the secular, this chapter will seek to illustrate different facets of the "fragilized" text. My assumption is that a single narrative can exhibit conflicting positions on science and religion, and does not consistently react to the opposing ideology in the same way. But rather than constituting a sign of a text's inferiority, these "inconsistencies" provide us with insight into the complexity of literary texts produced during a time in French cultural history traversed by divergent forces. This study will also provide a glimpse into the nature of contemporary debates at the intersection of Catholic and secular thought carried out by thinkers only seemingly entrenched in a given camp. It would seem that writers often wrote simultaneously to alleviate their doubts and to experiment with—or "experience"—the opposing ideology. These seeming contradictions also constitute different levels of "narrative (sub)consciousness" or varying authorial dispositions. Different passages of a narrative prove indicative of the multiple positions that a single author can hold on science and religion.

To explore the complexities of *fin-de-siècle* narratives, I will limit myself to Zola's and Huysmans's writings on the Lourdes phenomenon. In the late nineteenth century, the shrine became an obsession for proponents of both the Church and secularism. In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, as those who wanted to restore monarchy chose Lourdes as the site for pilgrimages of national penitence, the shrine thrived as a beacon of hope that attracted not only the ailing but also the multitudes seeking a Catholic alternative to the emerging secular republic. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visited Lourdes annually in the final decades of the nineteenth century. From 1878 to 1903, the shrine hosted as many as 3,500 national pilgrimages. And in 1908 an impressive one-and-a-half million believers came to the Grotto in

commemoration of the apparitions' fiftieth anniversary.[2] And yet, the fact that a majority of ailing pilgrims left the shrine unhealed, coupled with attacks from skeptics undermining the legitimacy of the healings, instilled unnerving doubt in Catholic thinkers like Huysmans. But the claims of miraculous healings also commanded a reply from the secular community that heeded the need to explain what was happening at Lourdes. Medical intellectuals became intrigued by the possibility of physical healings of ailments for which they were still aspiring to discover cures. The most notable example, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, composed *La Foi qui guérit* (1897) in an effort to explain the Lourdes phenomenon. The ambivalence of this text rests in its dual objective to dismiss claims of divine intervention in faith healings and to recognize the authenticity of physical healings as triggered by religious faith. It also admits to the gross inabilities of contemporary science to discredit all causes deemed "supernatural."[3] My interpretation of Zola's *Lourdes*, inspired in part by Charcot's article, seeks to highlight an even greater ambivalence of fascination and rejection vis-à-vis faith healings.

Arguably the most polarizing phenomenon for the naturalist and Catholic camps, the reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the mid-nineteenth century, and especially the bodily healings that allegedly occurred throughout the final decades of the century, provoked a heated debate among believers and nonbelievers. As historian Ruth Harris notes, "Lourdes became a focal point in the broader discussion between science and religion, and between anti-clericalism and clericalism" (11). For the faithful, the lure of Lourdes lay in "the miraculous and the individual encounter with the supernatural, a vision of community and of selfhood entirely at odds with secular creeds" (11). For secularists, the Lourdes phenomenon appeared as a gross anachronism whose "superstitions" threatened the very spirit of the modern age. The debate surrounding Lourdes that numerous intellectuals, church members, and leading scientists of the time engaged in demonstrates precisely the cross-pressures of science and religion that challenged each other. In this chapter, I will look closely at Zola's *Lourdes* (1894) and Huysmans's *Les Foules de Lourdes* (1906) as primary examples of such a debate.

Zola's interest in Lourdes lay, in large part, in two great challenges that the shrine posed. First, its numerous reported healings

demanded a scientific explanation that would dismiss supernatural intervention. And second, the formidable surge in religious belief sweeping France called for a second look at the theory of history as the "progressive" abandonment of "superstition." But Zola's effort to debunk claims of the miraculous is curiously accompanied by a fascination with the numinous that marks a turning point in the novelist's literary trajectory. With *Lourdes*, the naturalist appears in fact to suspend his unsympathetic position on religion. To begin, the narrative constitutes a clever observation of "the varieties of religious experiences." Its lengthy passages consisting in the detailed documentation of the diversity of religious sentiment make it the immediate precursor to James's renowned lectures on the psychology of the believing mind. Although the narrative's official ideology is atheistic naturalism, its descriptions often provide sympathetic portrayals of believers' psychological dispositions. Numerous passages resemble James's approach to the psychology of religious experience as a science, and, like James, present this psychology as profoundly human. Zola's reconsideration of religious sentiment not as superstition but as an inextricable dimension of the human condition also anticipates Freud's reassessment of the nature of religion, no longer as a vestige of childhood mentality or the symptom of compulsive neurosis (as expounded in *The Future of an Illusion*), but as part of "normal psychology," a fundamental defense against the death drive, a sublimation of instinctual aims, and the performance of a "civilizing" function (in *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Moses and Monotheism*).

In contemporaneous journal entries and correspondence, Zola admits to adopting a more sympathetic approach to religion. This shift in approach is made manifest within the novel in a specific narrative style marked by "experimental" modes of storytelling that dabble in the mystical. At times, the narrative's treatment of the religious can be read in the same vein as early works that targeted religious sentiment through ridicule or irony. However, at other times, the narrative appears to constitute a genuine literary experiment of the possibility of the unknown, fueled by Zola's ambivalent reaction of attraction-repulsion. To be sure, this experiment need not be entirely deliberate. I understand the "cross-pressures" of competing worldviews that lead to experimentation as conveying a vague but abiding awareness of—and sense of vulnerability to—the allure of the "other." In the novel, forms of

narration that break with the traditional intent of modes of narrative voice constitute the symptom of, and serve as a vehicle for, experimentation with the other side. The hybridity of *Lourdes*, in bearing the mark of both secular skepticism toward and enthralled fascination with the numinous, is indicative of a secularization project propelled as much by a continual questioning of the role of religious sentiment in society and psychology as it is by strong animosity toward faith in God. One of the major premises here is that these two propellers are not mutually exclusive.

Having officially converted to Catholicism a decade earlier, Huysmans chose to write on Lourdes to explore the depths of his faith. The time period in which Huysmans was devoted to composing *Les Foules de Lourdes* (1903–06) coincided with perhaps the most acute tension in modern French history between Church and State. Essayist François Angelier rightfully encourages us to read *Les Foules de Lourdes* in the context of early twentieth-century French anti-clericalism and dechristianization: "A quelle 'implacable' réalité Huysmans a-t-il eu affaire: le torchon brûle entre l'état français et l'Église (loi contre les congrégations–1901, loi de séparation de l'Église et de l'État–1905), c'est sur fond de Combisme triomphant et de radical-maçonnisme militant que ce livre se vit, se pense et s'écrit" (8). Angelier's remarks corroborate our understanding of Huysmans's publication as an apology of the Catholic faith, triggered by the affects of anxiety that he experienced in the wake of secularism's transformation of French society. But even more than the secularization of the French state, Huysmans perceived the greatest challenge to the Catholic faith as originating from contemporary science that sought to dismiss belief in the miraculous. In *Les Foules de Lourdes* the threatening "other" becomes manifest as contemporary scientific discourse, but more specifically, as the attack underlying the positivist dimensions of Zola's *Lourdes* on the notion of the miraculous. We will examine *Les Foules de Lourdes* as a methodical response to Zola's novel by launching its own assault on the many suggestive passages of the naturalist narrative in a point-by-point fashion. And yet, in Huysmans's text, naturalism also possesses an abiding allure for the Catholic convert who struggles with questions of faith. In arresting passages, the writer imagines a godless world and is tempted to relinquish his adherence to his belief system in the face of modern forms of reasoning.

To parry the negative affects that accompany the unsettling experience of doubt, Zola and Huysmans equally engage in the marshaling of evidence that will convince themselves of their position. What becomes evident through a comparison of their writings on Lourdes is that both authors, at a time when competing visions have destabilized their religious or secular persuasion, are necessarily "writing on faith." The "proofs" that the writers present actually convey the sense that they are writing from a position of doubt. Overall, the *Lourdes* text, in its stark similarities to Huysmans's faith-based work, exemplifies the precarious foundation of the still fledgling secularization project in the literature of the late nineteenth century. The literary culture of cross-pressures and faith-based writing that defined secular and religious writing of the time is most clearly visible in the treatment of evil. The indeterminacy and experimentation that characterize this literature are ultimately balanced by the compensatory entrenching effects of discourse on theodicy. By falling back on an established position on one side of the theodicy debate either for or against God in the face of evil, writers regain their existential footing in their worldview.

It would be inaccurate to describe the secular and religious literary traditions of *fin-de-siècle* France as discrete groups of text, one following on the heels of the other. Rather, the two traditions took shape together through a series of responses to the other's claims regarding questions of human nature, God, and evil. Along the lines of Susan Neiman who, in *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, approaches the various philosophical traditions of modern thought ultimately as attempts to define the world's intelligibility in the face of evil, much of modern French literature, especially during this time of competing theological and secular systems of thought, grappled with belief in God in light of human suffering. This dialogue between naturalists and Catholic writers established evil as the primary object of reflection, and indeed as the main subject of debate. How evil is understood and accounted for becomes the primary indicator of—and often the decisive factor in—belief or disbelief in God. In fact "evil," or human suffering, comes to be the one ontological truth—because it is perceived as utterly real—upon which visions of the natural and the supernatural are constructed. Such seemed to be the case with Freud who, in *Moses and Monotheism*, suggested that if he did not believe in God, it was because of the evil that existed in

the world: "We can only regret that certain experiences in life and observations in the world make it impossible for us to accept the premise of the existence of such a Supreme Being" (123). Of course, we may take with skepticism Freud's claim that he was led solely through unbiased observation to interpret religion not as revelation but as the symptom of a fundamental psychological mechanism of coping with an evil world. We certainly cannot discount the influence of Freud's own life work on his position vis-à-vis religion. I argue that the same can be said with respect to Zola's and Huysmans's writings on Lourdes in which the prior embrace of a religious or secular worldview determines their perception of mental and physical anguish. Whereas a more genuine philosophical inquiry would move from observation to the drawing of conclusions such that how we perceive "evil" phenomena informs our vision of the world, Zola and Huysmans demonstrate that often our *a priori* religious or secular position on evil conditions our perception of things.

Zola's *Lourdes*

Lourdes marks a turning point in Zola's career. Having just completed the final volume of the *Rougon-Macquart* series, Zola expressed the desire to cease writing novels weighed down by rigorous naturalist theories. In fact, he envisioned a new literary movement—which he called "le classicisme du naturalisme"—that would present a larger, more complex, and more sympathetic vision of humanity.[4] With *Lourdes*, Zola first expands the limits of his naturalist vision to revisit the place of religious sentiment in contemporary society. Most certainly, this spiritualizing turn can be explained in part by developments in Zola's biography, including the beginning of his amorous relationship with the much younger Jeanne Rozerot and his becoming a father. Zola's visit to the Lourdes shrine also proved highly influential.

The decision to write a novel about Lourdes—Bernadette's visions, the town's transformation into a place of pilgrimage, and the mass physical healings reportedly taking place there—can be traced back to Zola's brief stay there with his wife in September 1891. As evidenced by a letter that he addressed to Henry Céard only three days after leaving the shrine, Zola's first impressions were unequivocally enthusiastic. Enraptured by the city, Zola

states: "Nous sommes allés à Lourdes, qui m'a conquis. Oh! le beau livre à faire avec cette ville extraordinaire! Cela me hante, j'ai passé une nuit à en bâtir le plan" (*Correspondance* 7: 199). However, as René Ternois explains, Zola did not initially share his enthusiasm for Lourdes with many, for he feared being mocked (148). Most certainly, the naturalist felt odd in taking great interest in this religious matter, a domain that he was accustomed to deriding. Nevertheless, Zola's first impressions of Lourdes were certainly not short-lived. In a letter addressed to Edmond de Goncourt almost a year later, he finally elaborates on his initial fascination with the religious faith of the ailing pilgrims and the city's mystical attributes:

> Je suis un moment sorti… et la vue de ces malades, de ces marmiteux, de ces enfants mourants apportés devant la statue, de ces gens aplatis à terre dans le prosternement de la prière…, la vue de cette ville de la foi, née de l'hallucination de cette petite fille de quatorze ans, la vue de cette cité mystique en ce siècle de scepticisme… la vue de cette grotte, de ces défilés dans le paysage, de ces nuées de pèlerins de la Bretagne et de l'Anjou. […] Et bien, oui, ce spectacle m'a pris, m'a empoigné de telle sorte que parti pour Tarbes, j'ai passé deux nuits entières à écrire sur Lourdes.[5] (*Correspondance* 7: 199)

As suggested in his notes and correspondence, Zola's choice of Lourdes as the topic of his next story began as a type of fascination with what he had observed. Having temporarily suspended his *parti pris* of atheistic naturalism, Zola describes that he immediately felt pulled by ("pris," "empoigné") the spectacle of the mystical city ("cité mystique"), and spent two sleepless nights writing on the shrine. He similarly admits to journalists that he was more than moved ("frappé," "saisi") by what he saw: "Là, j'ai vu un groupe de pèlerins de la Vendée et de la Bretagne, et, *ma foi*, j'ai été *très saisi* par ce spectacle. […] Je n'y ai passé que quelques heures, mais ce que j'ai vu m'a *beaucoup frappé*" (qtd. by Ternois 149; emphasis added).

The nine pages that Zola wrote, and which Ternois describes as hasty and jumbled, became the novel's outline.[6] The naturalist's rough sketch of *Lourdes* is remarkably sympathetic at times. In its very first lines, Zola employs a number of superlatives to describe religion as a profound dimension of humanity:

> En ce moment de mysticité, de révolte contre la science, un *admirable* sujet: montrer le besoin du surnaturel persistant chez l'homme, avec cette *extraordinaire* histoire de Bernadette Soubirous, la petite paysanne de douze ans, ayant la vision de la Vierge dans la grotte et produisant cet *énorme mouvement d'humanité*… les foules accourues, cent cinquante mille personnes par an, je crois. Et là retrouver, étudier et peindre ce duel incessant entre la science et le besoin du surnaturel. (ms. 1456, fo 208; emphasis added)

In this moment of inspiration, it seems conceivable that as a fellow "human," he related to what he described as "le besoin du surnaturel persistant chez l'homme," which compelled him to write.

In his description of a new project, Zola seems to appropriate the perspective of the faithful at the expense of a common disillusionment with medical science, which he might have shared:

> Des médecins nient les miracles, d'autres les affirment: des guérisons sont enregistrées, de bonne foi (?) par milliers; la médecine qui reste un art, une magie, très loin de devenir expérimentable, toute cette rébellion de l'humanité contre la cruauté et l'injustice de la nature; puisque la science ne guérit pas à coup sûr, on s'adresse à l'inconnu, à la légende, au miracle; il y a des savants, des médecins qui, renonçant à leur science inutile, ne croient plus que dans le secours de l'au-delà; puis surtout les foules qui accourent, croyantes, extasiées: la Vierge guérit, on vient à la Vierge, et avec quelle foi! Dans notre siècle qui doute et qui blague, le côté stupéfiant de ce mouvement. (ms. 1456, fos 209–10)

In describing contemporary medicine as an "art" and a form of "magic," and nature as cruel and unjust, Zola seems to have adopted as his own the mind frame of the opposing camp. Nonetheless, the second half of the manuscript mitigates this initial, seemingly unconditional fascination with the shrine. Zola expresses skepticism of the claims of visions and healings (foreshadowed by the use of the parenthetical insertion of the question mark above) as well as the desire to "explain" Bernadette's visions as a symptom of neurosis. But in general, Zola's "hasty" and "jumbled" notes express a change in the author's demeanor toward religion. Accordingly, Ternois qualifies these pages as "étonnantes." They demonstrate, above all, the naturalist caught off guard: "Il est certain que sa surprise a été grande. Il n'imaginait pas un tel afflux

de croyants, une telle attente du miracle. Il ne savait rien et il est encore mal informé" (151).

After an initial enthrallment with the idea of a mystical city, Zola increasingly expressed anxiety toward Lourdes. During the novelist's second trip to the shrine one year later, once he began to place his writing project squarely within a naturalist agenda, he posed the question to a journalist of *Le Temps*, "Pourquoi ce recul inattendu?" (Ternois 238). Not only did the shrine pose a challenge to the naturalist's vision of history as the inevitable progression from religious "superstition" to the embrace of scientific truths, it also rivaled contemporary medicine in curing diseases that physicians had failed to treat adequately. Consequently, alongside his fascination with the city, Zola felt impelled to provide a scientific explanation of the faith healings that had begun to flourish there. In many of his journal entries devoted to his second trip to Lourdes, he closely followed Charcot's theories to interpret the "miracles" as the outcome of autosuggestion:

> Combien de maladies, sans qu'on le sache nettement, ont des racines nerveuses et peuvent dès lors être guéries ou du moins soulagées momentanément par une grande émotion, un élan de tout l'être, une volontée exaltée de guérir! […] Charcot envoie à Lourdes ceux de ses malades qui sont croyants. (Ternois 206, 211)

It would seem that a mounting anxiety instilled in Zola, on the eve of the twentieth century, the pressing desire to give an historical and scientific explanation of the mounting religious fervor and faith healings.

Zola's anxiety was acutely manifest in the case of healings that could not be attributed to autosuggestion. Faced with multitudes of believers, including doctors of faith readily available to testify to the divine nature of healings, and the once afflicted incessantly rejoicing in their cures, Zola's immediate response was to question the adequate documentation of such reported healings, that is to say, the procedures of the shrine's *Bureau des constatations*. The case that perhaps most troubled Zola was that of the young Clémentine Trouvé. Reportedly healed one year earlier of a decaying heel bone immediately following submersion into the waters, Trouvé showed the novelist the remaining scar. Zola's only response was to dismiss the miracle because he himself had not examined the

nature of Trouvé's heel before the purported healing.[7] In the following passage of "Mon voyage à Lourdes," Zola's reaction evinces both bewilderment and ensuing skepticism:

> Le miracle est ici absolu, puisque, dès qu'elle a été plongée dans la piscine, l'os s'est refait, la plaie s'est cicatrisée. Ici prodige stupéfiant. Du reste, la simple cicatrisation immédiate d'une coupure serait aussi prodigieuse. Pas de discussions possibles, comme pour les maladies nerveuses et les maladies internes où le diagnostic peut s'égarer. Si l'eau de Lourdes cicatrise immédiatement les plaies, les croyants ont tout intérêt à faire constater avec un luxe d'évidence et rien ne serait plus simple, je le répète. Pourquoi ne le font-ils pas? Cette petite Clémentine a la figure d'une petite paysanne intelligente, avec de beaux yeux vifs. Elle sait maintenant son histoire et la récite un peu trop. Une maligne. (*OC* 7: 771)

Zola's description of the Trouvé case as "stupéfiant" and as "prodigieux" recalls the observer's enthralled fascination with the "cité mystique" one year earlier. And yet, Zola channels his skepticism toward the report's legitimacy to frame his observations, to properly demarcate his subject position. His appeal to the demands of scientific observation partially assuages the initial troubling affect of amazement that he most certainly experienced in bearing witness to Trouvé's and others' testimony. And Zola's characterization of Trouvé, bordering on scorn, further suggests his discomfort vis-à-vis the testimony. The term *maligne*, meaning "cunning," possesses a specifically "evil" resonance, and reminds us of the characterizations of diabolic women in earlier narratives. For Zola, the Lourdes experience was one of sheer ambivalence, evoking both positive and negative feelings toward a not entirely controllable or definable "other." Perhaps this is what Ternois meant when he described Zola, in facing the living testimonies of healings at the shrine, as "embarrassé."[8]

Whereas Zola's attitude toward Lourdes appeared to become increasingly antagonistic, in discussing the nature of the novel that he began to plan he insisted that it would also express a sense of marvel that he had first experienced in visiting the city, and that continued to haunt him during his second visit. As he explains to a correspondant of *Le Gaulois*: "L'œuvre sera l'expression de mon religieux étonnement, car ce que je vois ici est merveilleux… C'est que j'ai vu ici des choses extra-naturelles" (Ternois 238). Zola's

description of his impressions as the astonishment of a specifically religious nature ("mon religieux étonnement") more than suggests that he had become enraptured in the Lourdes phenomenon, and that he surprised himself in experiencing the "cité mystique" much like the faithful. All in all, Zola's position toward the religious is surprisingly amicable to say the least. In fact, in an interview with Louis Colin of *L'Univers* during his second trip, Zola announces the novel's sympathetic portrayal of Catholic belief: "Mon ouvrage ne contristera aucun des amis de Lourdes… Ils n'y trouveront aucune négation du surnaturel… Ce qu'ils appellent miracle, je l'appellerai les grandes forces de l'au-delà" (Ternois 240). Given Zola's antagonistic position toward religious thought and especially toward Catholicism throughout most of his career, Ternois's description of Zola's comments on faith during his years of research and writing on Lourdes as "curious" is a bit of an understatement (240). For the naturalist to suggest that within a six-hundred-page novel, no negation of the supernatural can be found is quite striking. In light of this, less than a decade after the publication of *Lourdes*, it is not surprising that Huysmans, in a letter addressed to his friend while sejourning at the shrine, notes that the Fathers of the Grotto spoke about Zola in favorable terms.[9]

Despite Zola's own claim, an underlying current of the novel does work to "negate the supernatural." However, the author's comment also speaks to the dimension of the novel that suspends the naturalist temptation to draw certain conclusions on human faith in God, provides a sympathetic portrayal of religious experience as profoundly human, and even dabbles in the mystical. I believe that Zola's extra-literary comments on the shrine help us to understand *Lourdes* as a complex text in which an abiding attraction of the mystical encroaches upon the narrative's underlying positivism. Perhaps Zola himself became keenly aware of the complexity of *Lourdes*, as intimated by his statement that the novel was one of his "most complex and involved works."[10] As we will see, the novel provides both a positivist rendition of the Lourdes "miracles" as well as a mystical account that explores religious faith in divine intervention and imagines a numinous dimension of the human condition.[11]

The novel's plot recounts the pilgrimage of the young Marie de Guersaint, who travels to Lourdes in hopes of being cured of her paralysis. She is accompanied by her slightly older cousin Pierre,

a priest who secretly harbors not only a passionate love for Marie but also unnerving doubt in God. At this point in his spiritual journey, the burden of proof lies with the Church. The narrative focuses primarily on Pierre's inner conflict as he grapples with his position as a priest despite his abiding skepticism. It also devotes numerous and lengthy passages to the psychology of faith, in the case of Marie, but also of dozens of secondary characters. In the novel's second half, Marie is miraculously healed, along with a few other characters. Although at numerous points Pierre is tempted to regain his faith in God, and the reader in fact wonders whether Pierre will believe once again, in the novel's conclusion he finds contemporary scientific explanations of the healings to be irresistibly compelling.

The narrative structure of *Lourdes* is manifestly binary in that its overarching positivist account—as shared by the extradiegetic narrator and a few characters, including Pierre—is punctuated by a sympathetic portrayal of a variety of religious experiences and subject positions, as well as by a mystical rendition of the shrine. As Kathleen Comfort has already pointed out in "Divine Images of Hysteria in Émile Zola's *Lourdes*," the novel "presents the experience of miraculous healing through the double optic of positivism and Catholic mysticism, building as much on Catholic lay representations of miracles as it does on clinical accounts of spontaneous recovery from psychosomatic illnesses" (331). The narrative's "double optic" involves the description of both believers' and nonbelievers' reactions to the healings that occur during the pilgrimage. As a type of narrative double of Zola himself, Pierre is the chief representative of scientific opinion in the novel, assuming the role of positivist observer despite the fact that he continues to wear the cloth. Through interior monologues and instances of consonant psycho-narration, his observations at Lourdes lend to the novel its positivist account of faith healings. However, in conversation with Pierre and among themselves, believers bear lengthy witness to their conviction in divine intervention. This narrative dualism is multiplied and complicated by a number of factors. First and foremost, as a skeptic priest, Pierre himself becomes increasingly lured by the idea of God and the possibility of divine miracles as he struggles with what takes place at Lourdes. His official title as priest only dramatizes his spiritual confusion. Pierre constantly monitors the strength or weakness of

his faith as he considers the healings alongside Church doctrine and medical science. What's more, as a mirror image of Pierre's position as a skeptic priest who turns to science for explanations, a medical doctor (M. Chassaigne) gains faith in God and expresses his disappointment in science's inability to cure bodily suffering. Despite the overarching positivist account, Zola's novel especially presents itself as a study of the varieties of religious experience and subject positions vis-à-vis faith in God.

Whereas the extradiegetic narrator of Zola's novels typically purports to observe, document, and relay a scientific explanation of events, in *Lourdes* two opposing narrative voices rival one another. A positivist perspective of events is established in the first chapters in which Pierre recollects his loss of faith in the face of reason a few years prior to the start of the story. In the following passage, the extradiegetic narrator describes in seemingly paradoxical, quasi-religious terms of truth and light but that are characteristic of naturalist discourse, reason's victory over religion in the priest's existential struggle:

> Et Pierre revécut, en quelques minutes, l'effroyable crise qui, pendant deux mois, l'avait dévasté. […] Peu à peu, malgré lui, la clarté scientifique se faisait, un ensemble de phénomènes prouvés qui démolissaient les dogmes, qui ne laissaient rien en lui des faits auxquels il devait croire. […] Au séminaire, sur le conseil de ses maîtres, il avait toujours refréné l'esprit d'examen, son besoin de savoir. Ce qu'on enseignait le surprenait bien; mais il arrivait à faire le sacrifice de sa raison, qu'on exigeait de sa piété. Et voilà qu'à cette heure, tout ce laborieux échafaudage du dogme se trouvait emporté, dans une révolte de cette raison souveraine, qui clamait ses droits, qu'il ne pouvait plus faire taire. La vérité bouillonnait, débordait, en un tel flot irrésistible, qu'il avait compris que jamais plus il ne parviendrait à refaire l'erreur en son cerveau. (60)

In the same positivist vein, the narrative provides a medical explanation of Marie's healing, and long before the actual event takes place. Beauclair, Marie's doctor, explains to Pierre that the root of Marie's paralysis is a case of hysteria in which she remains convinced of her infirmity well after her lesion has healed. Beauclair asserts that Marie's psychological disorder can be cured through a transformation of the mind—one that would dissolve the patient's conviction in her own illness—which faith healing can effectively trigger:

> Cette idée que Marie rêvait son mal, que les affreuses souffrances qui la torturaient venaient d'une lésion guérie depuis longtemps, avait paru si paradoxale à Pierre. […] [Beauclair] s'était écrié qu'il fallait la mener à Lourdes. […] Même il annonçait comment se produirait le miracle, en coup de foudre, dans un réveil, une exaltation de tout l'être, tandis que le mal, ce mauvais poids diabolique qui étouffait la jeune fille, remonterait une dernière fois et s'échapperait, comme s'il lui sortait par la bouche. (67–68)

This perspective closely follows Charcot's article on faith healing.[12] In line with the surgeon's own assumptions, Beauclair validates faith healing as a viable method of combating certain diseases. But to clarify, as Charcot insisted, faith healing is presented as a psychosomatic transformation rather than as divine intervention.

A second paradigm, based on Christian belief, is equally voiced throughout the novel, if ultimately framed by the positivist account. On several occasions, Marie shares with Pierre her religious conviction that the Virgin will heal her while at Lourdes:

> Oh! Pierre, que je suis heureuse!… Je l'ai vue, je l'ai priée pour vous, et elle m'a souri, elle m'a fait un petit signe de la tête, pour me dire qu'elle m'entendait et qu'elle m'exaucait… Et elle ne m'a pas parlé, Pierre, mais j'ai compris ce qu'elle me disait. C'est aujourd'hui, à quatre heures du soir, que je serai guérie, lorsque le saint sacrement passera. (324–25)

As Comfort explains, "Marie's conviction that she will be healed contrasts with Pierre's positivistic view of the events, so that there is in the narration a balance between the spiritual and the clinical" (335). However, Marie's conviction even instills in Pierre the hope of regained faith. Her faith has the effect of reawakening Pierre's religious sentiment and the desire to believe in God once again: "[Pierre] sentit une douceur, une espérance inavouée le pénétrer, à l'idée que Marie avait raison peut-être, que la Vierge pourrait le prendre en pitié […]. Et il en arriva ainsi au désir de tenter la suprême expérience" (66–67). In this passage, the use of qualifiers such as "peut-être" and the conditional ("pourrait") testifies to an abiding desire ("désir"), a temptation to wager on the supernatural ("tenter la suprême expérience") that helps explain Pierre's conflicting thoughts and sentiments regarding faith in God. Accordingly, Marie's pilgrimage to Lourdes is also Pierre's. And because

Pierre shadows the author in "observing" and "documenting," the narrative itself entertains the possibility of the supernatural by intimately exploring the psychology of faith. In light of this, we can consider *Lourdes* a truly "experimental" novel.

A significant portion of the *Lourdes* narrative sympathetically documents the pilgrims' religious convictions, especially the hope that the Holy Virgin will heal their afflictions. The first of the novel's five sections or days details conversations during the long train ride from Paris to Lourdes in which the faithful recount to one another a litany of miracles that have occurred over the years. What is noteworthy about this section, for our purposes, is that in providing a lengthy portrayal of the psychology of the faithful, the narrative in fact temporarily adopts the faith of its characters. The first to give witness is Sophie, the fictitious rendition of Clémentine Trouvé, who testifies to her own healing at Lourdes one year prior to the present pilgrimage. Her testimony is followed by the narrator's sympathetic commentary on the salutary effects of Sophie's story on the passengers:

> Dans la souffrance qui venait de les reprendre, au départ de Poitiers, terrifiés par les quinze heures qu'ils avaient à rouler encore, l'arrivée brusque de cette enfant, *élue par le Ciel*, était comme un soulagement divin, le rayon d'espoir où ils puiseraient la force d'aller jusqu'au bout. (93; emphasis added)

It is noteworthy that the narrator appropriates the discourse of the faithful in characterizing Sophie as chosen by God. A few paragraphs later, once Sophie exposes her ankle where the healing occurred, the narrator appears to confirm divine intervention as he taps into the believers' psychology: "Les malades voulaient tous voir le pied miraculeux, cette *preuve visible de la guérison divine*, qu'ils allaient tous chercher" (96; emphasis added). The above examples seem to present us with instances of what Dorrit Cohn describes as consonant psycho-narration, in which the narrator "readily fuses with the consciousness that he narrates" (26). As the supposedly naturalist narrator does not impose his own perspective, Zola's narrative of the faithful's thoughts and perceptions appear as literal consciousness representation.

Sophie's story is followed by many others that recount in detail "miraculous" healings throughout the years, including Pierre de Rudder, healed of a broken leg, Louis Bourriette, who regained

his sight, François Macary, whose varicose ulcers disappeared, and both the widow Rizan and Lucie Druon, healed of paralysis. Once more, as the pilgrims take courage in stories of miracles, the cognitive distance between the narrator and the characters is imperceptible as the former affirms the intervention of the Heavens in the latter's physical healing and spiritual awakening: "L'intérêt grandissait toujours, la joie ravie de ces beaux contes, où *le Ciel à tous coups triomphait* des réalités humaines, exaltait ces âmes d'enfant, au point que les plus malades se redressaient, à leur tour, et retrouvaient la parole" (100–01; emphasis added).

After the narrative relates numerous other testimonies of the sick healed of tumors and consumption, Sister Hyacinthe and Mme de Jonquière recount some of the countless miracles that they witnessed during their previous visits to the shrine. Because the stories span several pages, the reader begins to lose sight of who the storyteller is. Moreover, since the text summarizes the "miracles" seemingly in its own words, it would appear as if the narrative has adopted the stories as its own, and that the incidents recounted are simply a list of historical events:

> Ensuite, ce furent toutes sortes de maux. D'abord, les accidents de la scrofule, encore des jambes perdues et refaites: Marguerite Gehier, malade d'une coxalgie depuis vingt-sept ans, la hanche dévorée par le mal, le genou droit ankylosé, tombant brusquement à genoux, pour remercier la Sainte Vierge de sa guérison; Philomène Simmoneau, la jeune Vendéenne, la jambe gauche trouée par trois plaies horribles, au fond desquelles les os cariés, à découvert, laissaient tomber des esquilles, et dont les os, la chair et la peau se reforment. Puis vinrent les hydropiques. (106–07)

The lengthy enumeration of healings, of which I have provided only the first few sentences of a three-page summary, take on a testimonial and documentary nature. By presenting the healings in this fashion, the narrative emulates the believers' perspective.

Scholars have commented on the use in Zola's novels of free indirect discourse, especially the *Rougon-Macquart* series, in which the narrator relays the thoughts and feelings of the characters so indirectly that an imprudent reader might mistake them for the narrator's own. But for several reasons the passages above, and many others in *Lourdes*, cannot be read as examples. Scholars

have shown that instances of free indirect discourse are typically preceded by specific signals that alert the reader to a switch in narrative mode, such as a short sentence that relays a character's thoughts or perception (rather than the narrator's), and that is often followed by a colon. In the tradition of nineteenth-century French Realism, the portion of the narrative commonly labeled free indirect discourse only constitutes a sentence or two, followed by another signal of transition back to the regular narrative mode. Moreover, the very phrase that presents an instance of the mode contains markers that draw attention to its unique nature, such as the use of the imperfect verb tense, italicized words, exclamatory words or phrases, exclamation points, and question marks.[13] To take but one example, consider the following use of free indirect discourse, drawn from *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* (1875), in which the Virgin's love for the eponymous character Serge Mouret is presented as the priest's own perception:

> Il se sentit aimé. Marie lui donnait son cœur vivant, tel qu'il battait dans son sein, avec l'égouttement rose de son sang. Il n'y avait plus là une image de passion devote, mais une matérialité, un prodige de tendresse, qui, lorsqu'il priait devant la gravure, lui faisait élargir les mains pour recevoir religieusement le cœur sautant de la gorge sans tache. Il le voyait, il l'entendait battre. *Il était aimé, le cœur battait pour lui*! (*OC* 1: 1292–93; emphasis added)

This instance of free indirect discourse (italicized), which by itself proclaims the Virgin's love for Father Mouret, is presented in such a way that the reader would not confuse it with the narrator's voice. It is preceded by a description that draws attention to the priest's perception of things, underscored by the verbs "se sentir," "entendre," and "voir." Also this example includes the use of the imperfect and the exclamation point. Although common in much of Zola's fiction, this mode is absent from the lengthy descriptions of miracles in *Lourdes*, marked rather by a strictly documentary style, its use of the simple past, its straightforward presentation of a list of events with no reference to a character's thoughts or perception, and its sheer length. The observations that I make here suggest that there is much less cognitive dissonance in Zola's later fiction than in his earlier works between the narrator and specifically his characters of faith. It is as if the narrator, pulled "toward"

the other side, becomes psychologically or emotionally invested in the alternative mode of thought. Given the author's admission of his own emotional attraction to the shrine in his journal, notes, and correspondence, this interpretation seems warranted.

In earlier novels, the faith of believing characters is treated above all through the lens of the scientific skeptic. The narrator of *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* repeatedly casts the Catholic faith as a childhood mentality that seeks comfort through belief in a sympathetic God, and the priesthood as a suppression of man's true essence as a sexual being:

> Il fermait la porte de ses sens. […] Sa raison le trompait, ses désirs mentaient. (*OC* 1: 1233)
>
> Plus tard, après son ordination, le jeune prêtre était venu aux Artaud, sur sa propre demande, avec l'espoir de réaliser son rêve d'anéantissement humain. (*OC* 1: 1232)
>
> On avait tué l'homme en lui, il le sentait, il était heureux de se savoir à part, créature châtrée, marquée de la tonsure ainsi qu'une brebis du Seigneur. (*OC* 1: 1234)
>
> S'il restait si tard à prier dans l'église, c'était avec l'idée folle que la grande Vierge dorée finirait par descendre. (OC 1: 1295)

In contrast, the narrative consciousness of *Lourdes* appears to let down its guard and become enraptured in the religious experience that it is documenting. On multiple occasions, the religious is something that the narrator does not deem in need of immediate "quarantine." In other words, the unbelieving narrator does not avail himself of the numerous "containing" techniques of narrative discourse in order to disown characters' sentiments. On the contrary, lengthy self-sustaining passages afford the reader a textual experience of the religious from the perspective of the faithful. It unfurls a spiritual consciousness that opens up to a world of mystery, and constitutes a significant if temporary hiatus to positivism.

The *Lourdes* narrative goes far beyond rendering a sympathetic description of religious psychology by presenting a mystical rendition of the shrine. The allure of the spiritual world is especially evident in the novel's scenery and festivity descriptions. Once again, the narrator does not adopt the perspective of any particular character. Rather, much like Zola, who described his first impression

of the shrine as religious astonishment ("religieux étonnement"), the narrative falls under the spell of the divinelike spectacle:

> Il était huit heures, le soleil déjà haut, un soleil d'août triomphal, flambait dans le grand ciel d'une pureté admirable. Lavé par l'orage de la nuit, il semblait que le bleu de l'air fût tout neuf, d'une fraîcheur d'enfance. Et l'effrayant défilé, cette cour des miracles de la souffrance humaine, roulait sur le pavé en pente, dans l'éclat de la *radieuse* matinée. […] Le soleil frappait en plein le Grand Bêout et le Petit Bêout, aux coupoles d'inégale hauteur. C'était comme un fond de pourpre et d'or, un mont *éblouissant*, où l'on ne distinguait que le chemin qui serpente et monte au Calvaire, parmi des arbres. Et là, sur ce fond ensoleillé, rayonnant ainsi qu'une *gloire*, se détachaient les trois églises superposées*, que la voix grêle de Bernadette avait fait surgir du roc, à la louange de la Sainte Vierge*. […] Et enfin, la Basilique s'élançait, un peu mince et frêle, trop neuve, trop blanche, avec son style amaigri de fin bijou, jaillie des roches de Massabielle *ainsi qu'une prière, une envolée de colombe pure*. La flèche si menue, au-dessus des rampes gigantesques, n'apparaissaient que *comme la petite flamme droite d'un cierge*, parmi l'immense horizon, la houle sans fin des vallées et des montagnes. (169, 173; emphasis added)

The narrative paints an equally mystical portrait of the evening parades of pilgrims holding lighted candles:

> L'apparition brusque des petites clartés continuait avec une régularité mécanique, *comme si quelque céleste source inépuisable* eût ainsi déversé cette poussière de soleil. […] Au ciel, il semblait y avoir moins d'étoiles. Une voie lactée était tombée de là-haut, roulant son poudroiement de mondes, et qui continuait sur la terre la ronde des astres. Une clarté bleue ruisselaient, il n'y avait plus que du ciel, les monuments et les arbres prenaient *une apparence de rêve, dans la lueur mystérieuse* des milliers de cierges, dont le nombre croissait toujours. (299–300; emphasis added)

As these passages and others demonstrate, in describing the spectacle of Lourdes the narrator resorts to a number of religiously charged signifiers and metaphors. Instead of reinterpreting the shrine in naturalist terms, the narrative maintains a religious frame of reference, drawing on Catholic symbols to describe the scenery. One could argue that passages such as these approximate

Baudelaire's lyric poetry—namely, in "Correspondances" and "Harmonie du soir"—of vertical and horizontal correspondences between the natural and the spiritual realms. These passages most evidence the creative process of writing and seem akin to dreaming awake.

The spectacle of light, effectively rendered in religious terms, is certainly puzzling for readers familiar with Zola's previous works, especially when accompanied by declarative sentences on supernatural phenomena (as they exceed typical instances of sublimation). To take one example, the narrative interprets Marie's countenance while kneeling in prayer at the Grotto as a sign of divine presence:

> Mais ce fut une apparition divine que le visage de Marie, rendue à l'extase. […] [Elle] était là, sous la lueur pâle des flambeaux, si belle parmi ses cheveux blonds, avec ses yeux élargis, ses traits transfigurés par la foi, que tous l'admirèrent. Elle communia éperdument, *le Ciel descendait visiblement en elle*, dans son pauvre corps de jeunesse, réduit à une telle misère physique. (243; emphasis added)

Here, the adverb *visiblement* contrasts with the subjective position of Marie (taking communion "éperdument") as the narrator inserts his own "clinical" observation of the divine. Comfort references this passage to contend that the novel's "spiritual aspect is so pervasive that the reader tends to forget the young woman's clinical diagnosis of hysteria" (337).

The narrative's religio-mystical dimension is most pervasive during an unmistakably mystical scene that occurs midway through the novel. The depiction of a garden permeated with the scent of invisible roses is unequivocally cloaked in mystery. Perched on a hillside overlooking the town of Lourdes and its spectacle of lighted candles, Pierre and Marie suddenly detect a powerful smell of roses. Logically, they begin to search the premises for flowers, which give them inexplicable joy but which, despite their effort, they are never able to find. Although they cannot explain the source of the sweet scent, they abandon their intent to understand and fall into a state of blissful reverie:

> "Et les roses, ce parfum des roses… Ne les sentez-vous pas, mon ami? Où sont-elles donc, que vous ne les avez pas vues?"

> —Oui, oui, je le sens, mais il n'y a pas de roses. Je les aurais vues certainement, car je les ai bien cherchées.
>
> —Comment pouvez-vous dire qu'il n'y a pas de roses, quand elles embaument l'air autour de nous, et que nous baignons dans leur parfum? Tenez! à certaines minutes, ce parfum est si puissant, que je me sens défaillir de joie, à le respirer! Elles sont là, certainement, innombrables sous nos pieds. […]
>
> Pierre et Marie restèrent seuls, dans ce coin d'obscure solitude, où s'exhalait le parfum des roses, sans qu'il y eût une seule rose aux alentours. […] Et eux s'oubliaient, ne bougeaient toujours pas, délicieusement heureux, dans l'odeur des roses invisibles. (298, 306, 308)

As a well-known symbol of the Virgin, these roses significantly contribute to the novel's Catholic mysticism that, I would argue, also represents the point in Zola's entire opus farthest removed from his positivist ideology. While the invisible roses are referred to on several occasions later in the novel, they are never "scientifically" explained but remain a mystery. Could it be that in this case Zola himself relinquished the imperative to attribute phenomena to natural causes? Earlier, I made reference to two great influences in Zola's turn toward a more spiritual rendition of the human condition: his visit to the Lourdes shrine and his amorous relationship with Jeanne Rozerot. This passage's resort to roses as a source of the numinous certainly testifies to Zola's initial enthrallment with Lourdes, but the linguistic rapprochement of rose and Rozerot, his lover's family name, suggests that the passage was also inspired by Zola's genuine passionate sentiment.

A consistently binary novel that features conflicting worldviews on the levels of plot and narrative voice, *Lourdes* provides an illustration of its own dual nature in the character of Pierre. In oscillating between faith and skepticism, the incredulous priest serves as a *mise-en-abyme* of the disparate layers of the narrative itself. On several occasions, Pierre, as a type of narrator, recounts to the suffering pilgrims on the train to and from Lourdes Bernadette's life story. While he narrates aloud the official, Catholic version of her visions, the reader is also made privy to a second narrative in which Pierre reinterprets in his mind from a naturalist perspective the events of Bernadette's life and her "hallucinations." The text itself draws attention to this narrative split as a doubling effect in its emphasis that "Pierre s'était comme dédoublé" (129). The narrative explains that in recounting the Catholic version, Pierre

would "get lost" or "caught up" in the magical, enchanting world of divine apparitions: "Pierre *s'oubliait* à faire une peinture charmante de l'ancien Lourdes, de cette petite ville pieuse, endormie au pied des Pyrénées" (132; emphasis added). In her emphasis on Pierre's role as Zola's double, Collette Becker comments on this sentence's significance, for it suggests that in writing a story on the spiritual world of Lourdes, Zola too forgot himself: "Comme Pierre a 'un délicieux moment d'abandon, ne cherchant plus à rien expliquer, acceptant la voyante avec son cortège somptueux de miracles,' Zola s'oublie. […] On ne sait plus ce qui relève de l'enquête ou de la fiction, du réel ou de l'imagination à partir du réel, du rêve" (250–51). The types of sustained narrative in *Lourdes* that paint a religio-metaphysical universe are instances in which the Zolian narrative, drawn toward the other side, dabbles in the mystical and the divine. While much of the narrative's core, especially Pierre's temptations to believe once again, can be attributed to a case of the "staging of doubt" (doubt in positivism), this staging is not incompatible with its underside, an abiding allure of the religious other.

This allure understandably effects an enduring sense of vulnerability in which the claims of supernatural phenomena and Catholic revival threaten not only the naturalist's espoused belief system, but ultimately his sense of self. This threatening allure is made manifest at the level of the plot, especially as the narrative heads toward its denouement. During the fourth section of the novel in which numerous healings occur during a religious ceremony of supplication and song at the Grotto, Pierre, as the naturalist narrator's avatar, becomes enchanted by what he witnesses. He is in fact moved to prayer and tempted to abandon "reason" as he gets caught up in the mystical ceremony. But this time, the narrator presents the allure of the other as a "vertiginous" threat to Pierre's very sense of self:

> Déjà, au bureau des constatations, Pierre avait souffert de cette crédulité du milieu. Mais, ici, cela dépassait tout, il s'exaspérait des extravagances qu'il entendait, et si paisiblement dites, avec des sourires clairs d'enfant. Aussi tâchait-il de s'absorber, de n'écouter rien. "Mon Dieu! faites donc que ma raison s'anéantisse, que je ne veuille plus comprendre, que j'accepte l'irréel et l'impossible." Pendant un instant, il se croyait mort à l'examen, il se laissait emporter par le cri de supplication: "Seigneur,

> guérrissez nos malades!… Seigneur, guérissez nos malades!" Il le répétait de toute sa charité, il joignait les mains, regardait la statue de la Vierge fixement, jusqu'au vertige, jusqu'à s'imaginer qu'elle bougeait. (395)

Here, Pierre is described as attempting to occasion his own existential death by voluntarily jumping into the "annihilating" abyss of fervent religion. The decidedly negative portrayal of religious enthrallment that emerges is part of a larger shift in textual mode in order to "quarantine" this threat, to protect the narrative itself from the abyss. Unlike earlier points in the novel such as the passage of the "invisible roses," this scene lacks the latter's mystical energy, due to the psychic distance that the narrative establishes between the extradiegetic narrator and Pierre. Through the use of direct quotation and verbs of perception ("regarder," "imaginer," "entendre," "s'absorber") the narrator neatly separates himself from Pierre's conscious state. Accordingly, this passage presents us with a prime example of dissonant rather than consonant psychonarration. To apply Dorrit Cohn's terminology, we can say that the "prominent narrator remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates" (26). Unlike in earlier scenes, the narrative consciousness of the passage follows the imperative to explain.

In the final sections of *Lourdes*, in stark contrast to the pilgrims, narrative consciousness retreats from mystical abandon. For instance, once Marie is healed at the Grotto, her own faith is as ardent as ever, and Pierre's sentiment and reactions become inseparable from those of the crowd of believers. In the following description, Pierre's description becomes absorbed by that of the rejoicing pilgrims:

> Pierre, dans la commotion violente qu'il avait reçue au cœur, s'était mis à pleurer. De nouveau, les larmes ruisselaient de tous les yeux. Au milieu des exclamations, des gratitudes, des louanges, un frénétique enthousiasme gagnait de proche en proche, soulevait d'une emotion croissante les milliers de pèlerins qui s'écrasaient pour voir. Des applaudissements se déchaînèrent, une furie d'applaudissements dont le tonnerre roula d'un bout à l'autre de la vallée. (403)

But the narrator, in an act of disassociation that begins to reorient the spirit of the narrative toward the official naturalist version of

events, describes the religious rapture that has taken over Pierre as a "contagion," and as an overwhelming force that "crushes": "La contagion finirait bien par agir, [Pierre] ne serait plus que le grain de sable parmi les grains de sable, humble parmi les humbles de la meule, sans s'inquiéter des forces qui les écrasaient" (395). Here, the narrator asserts his position of superiority over Pierre by contrasting the priest's ignorance with the "reality" of the situation.

But as a double of the narrator, it is only a matter of time until Pierre too regains his footing in the "reality" of what is happening to and around him. During the scene of Marie's healing, a memory of Pierre's comes back to haunt him, but as if to "protect" him from completely losing himself to the type of psychic release that the seemingly irrefutable miraculous nature of Marie's healing would otherwise trigger. At the precise moment in which Pierre begins to feel a divine force take possession of his being ("ce moment suprême"), the memory of Dr. Beauclair's prediction, detailed description, and scientific explanation of Marie's healing resurfaces with forceful clarity. A striking example of Proust's involuntary memory, this detailed recollection acts to reground the self in the naturalist vision of things:

> Mais, brusquement, sans qu'il sût par quelle liaison d'idées, un souvenir lui revint, celui de la consultation qu'il avait exigée sur le cas de la jeune fille, avant le départ pour Lourdes. La scène se précisait, d'une netteté extraordinaire, il revoyait la chambre avec son papier gris, à fleurs bleues, il entendait les trois médecins discuter et conclure. […] Et Pierre était surpris de retrouver dans sa mémoire, à cette minute suprême, des choses qu'il ne savait pas y être, par ce phénomène singulier qui fait parfois que des paroles, à peine écoutées, mal entendues, emmagasinées comme malgré soi, se réveillent, éclatent, s'imposent, après de longs oublis. Il lui semblait que l'approche même du miracle évoquât les conditions dans lesquelles Beauclair lui avait annoncé qu'il s'accomplirait. Vraiment, Pierre s'efforça de chasser ce souvenir. […] Une dernière fois, Pierre tenta de ne plus voir, de ne plus entendre, car il sentait que c'était en lui la ruine irréparable du miracle. Et, malgré ses efforts, malgré l'ardeur qu'il mettait à crier "Jésus, fils de David, guérissez nos malades!" il voyait, il entendait toujours Beauclair lui dire, de son air calme et souriant, comment le miracle s'accomplirait, en coup de foudre, à la seconde de l'extrême émotion, sous la circonstance décisive qui achèverait de délier les muscles. (396–98)

As this passage indicates, Pierre suppressed the memory of Beauclair's diagnosis of Marie's illness for almost the entire Lourdes narrative. The consultation scene was initially evoked in the first section of the novel and then "forgotten" until this "decisive moment" more than four hundred pages later when Pierre finds himself at the brink of utter psychic vulnerability to reconversion. And from this moment on, as if awakening from a dream, Pierre maintains a state of lucidity regarding what has happened at the Grotto. What's more, his self is re-anchored firmly in his faith in science and in unbelief in God.

The narrative regains sure footing in a resolutely naturalist account of things not only through instances of psychic dissonance and the protagonist's embrace of a purely medical interpretation of healings, but also by resorting to questions of theodicy that take into account the harsh reality of injustice and bodily suffering. Immediately following the lengthy description of miracles that concludes the novel's fourth section, the narrative retreats from a sympathetic position on the religious to focus its attention on the human suffering that persists at the shrine. The narrator begins to take note that most pilgrims leave as sick as when they arrived: "Tous les maux abominables, toutes les plaies, toutes les difformités défilaient une fois encore, sans que la gravité ni le nombre en parussent moindres, comme si les guérisons fussent l'humble clarté inappréciable au milieu du deuil immense" (511). This type of juxtaposition of the few at the shrine who heal with the multitudes who do not is also made in the pages that follow Marie's "miracle." While the crowds are celebrating Marie's healing, the narrator diverts our attention to the case of Gustave, a young adolescent whose terminal illness is ignored by the Virgin. The narrative does not fail to highlight the material reality of the suffering body, which casts doubt on God's existence:

> Gustave finit par s'abandonner au cou de son père. Il arriva en chemise, grelottant, montrant la nudité de son petit corps, que rongeait la scrofule. Loin de le guérir, il semblait que l'eau miraculeuse de la piscine eût avivé la plaie de ses reins; tandis que sa maigre jambe pendait inerte, pareille à un bâton desséché. […] Le petit Gustave était resté sur ses genoux, frissonnant de tout son pauvre corps d'insecte avorté, dans sa chemise retroussée à demi, qui laissait voir sa maigreur d'enfant mourant. […] Il fal-

> lut que Gustave embrassât [ses parents], en leur promettant de vivre, de faire cela pour eux. Cependant, il n'avait pas cessé de sourire, sachant bien que le mensonge était nécessaire, quand on voulait ne pas trop s'attrister, […] puisque la Sainte Vierge elle-même ne pouvait lui donner, en ce monde, le petit coin de bonheur pour lequel toute créature aurait dû naître. (459–62)

This complex passage, which recalls the narrator's indictment of God in "Mademoiselle Bistouri" for allowing monsters to exist (see Chapter 1), melds the adolescent's feelings of anger toward a helpless deity and the common opinion seemingly shared by the narrator that all children deserve happiness ("la Sainte Vierge elle-même ne pouvait lui donner […] le petit coin de bonheur pour lequel toute créature aurait dû naître"). In acutely asserting the reality of an unjust world through the description of a child's suffering, the passage serves the purpose of dismissing the belief in a benevolent God. The use of the past conditional in the final sentence to explain what should have been the case ("aurait dû") implies the relative clause "if God were good," or "if God had intervened," or "if God existed." The transition in the novel from complicit accounts of miraculous healings to a description of the pilgrims' enduring ailments can be understood as a re-anchoring of the narrative in naturalism.

The materialist depictions of the ailing sick in the final section of *Lourdes* focuses anew on the biological that characterizes Zola's earliest fiction. In Chapter 3, I discussed "le mal" in *Thérèse Raquin* as originating from the body (heredity, bodily drives, neurology, etc.), and as a form of justice that afflicts the very same body. It could be argued that *Lourdes* even more radically reduces "le mal" to a medical diagnosis of the pilgrims' physical sufferings. As the portrayal of human suffering becomes the sole interest of the narrative, it eclipses the supernatural. The insistence upon physical evil in observations on the overwhelming majority of ailing pilgrims who are not healed forms the argument against God's existence.

To take another example, the narrative recounts the death of an infant much to the same effect as the episode devoted to Gustave's illness. On the third day, during one of the enrapturing ceremonies at the Grotto, Mme Vincent implores the Virgin to heal Rose, her dying baby. It is precisely during the mother's fervent prayer to

the Virgin Mary that Rose expires. The description of inclement weather and destructive lightning that closes this passage paints the image of a malign divinity:

> "Ô Vierge, Mère du Sauveur, guérrissez-la!… Ô Vierge, Mère toute puissante, guérissez-la!"
>
> Mais elle sentit son enfant plus légère encore sur ses bras tendus. Et, maintenant, elle s'effrayait de ne plus l'entendre se plaindre, de la voir si blanche, avec ses yeux ouverts, sa bouche ouverte, sans un souffle. Pourquoi ne souriait-elle pas, si elle était guérie? Tout d'un coup, il y eut un grand cri déchirant, le cri de la mère, dominant la foudre, dans l'orage qui redoublait. Sa fille était morte. Et elle se leva toute droite, elle tourna le dos à cette Vierge sourde, qui laissait mourir les enfants; et elle repartit comme une folle sous l'averse battante, allant devant elle sans savoir où, emportant et berçant toujours le pauvre petit corps, qu'elle gardait sur les bras depuis tant de jours et tant de nuits. Le tonnerre tomba, dut fendre un des arbres voisins, d'un coup de cognée géant, dans un grand craquement de branches tordues et brisées. (328–29)

Bearing witness to Rose's death and Mme Vincent's utter despair, Pierre reflects on the incomprehensible nature of the event:

> La mort de la petite Rose venait encore de l'enfiévrer davantage, il ne pouvait chasser l'idée de cette mère crucifiée, errant par les chemins boueux, avec le corps de son enfant. Quelles étaient donc les raisons qui décidaient la Vierge? Cela le stupéfiait qu'elle put choisir, il aurait voulu savoir comment son cœur de Mère divine pouvait se résoudre à ne guérir que dix malades sur cent […]. Lui, déjà s'était déjà demandé, s'il avait eu le pouvoir d'en sauver dix, lesquels il aurait élus. Pouvoir terrible, choix redoutable, dont il ne se serait pas senti le courage! Pourquoi celui-ci, pourquoi pas celui-là? Où était la justice, où était la bonté? Être la puissance infinie et les guérir tous, n'était-ce pas le cri qui sortait des cœurs? Et la Vierge lui apparaissait cruelle, mal renseignée, aussi dure et indifférente que l'impassible nature, distribuant la vie et la mort comme au hasard, selon des lois ignorées de l'homme. (329–30)

In this example of consonant psychonarration, in which the narrator sympathetically relays Pierre's incredulous thoughts, the text imparts a growing sense of the absurdity of a divinely ordered world. But this tragic story does not achieve closure until the

novel's conclusion, when the infant's death is evoked once more. When considered alongside the passage on Gustave, the tragedy appears as part of the novel's attempt to provide a final, sobering image of a shrine where the vast majority of sick are not healed, and where even children die. As the train departs from Lourdes, Mme Vincent continues to lament her child's death. Her mounting anger at God transforms into the utter loss of faith: "Il n'y a pas de Sainte Vierge! Il n'y a pas de bon Dieu!" (533). The passages devoted to the death of baby Rose clearly contrast with the mystical passage of roses at the novel's center. In the conclusion, the infant's death all but dispels the mystical aura of the novel's middle sections. It is as if, unable to explain the scent of "invisible roses," the naturalist perspective has but to turn its attention to the evil of the world. These concluding passages on infant suffering and death adumbrate a stance vis-à-vis theodicy that takes into account the reality of innocent suffering in order to draw what would appear to be the only logical conclusion on God: his inexistence.

By means of concluding, a few final words must be said of Zola's position on religion, as it evolved in his later fiction. The emergence of a writing against theodicy in *Lourdes* does not constitute a simple reaffirmation of Zola's previous position on religion as simply a set of metaphysical illusions. In earlier works, Zola often equated religious sentiment with both neurosis and childhood pusillanimity, a line of thought that Freud too would follow in his early writings. Even small portions of the *Lourdes* narrative suggest that this understanding of religion remained compelling to Zola. Most specifically, the narrative presents (female) neurosis as a possible cause of both Marie's paralysis and her faith healing. More generally, the narrative describes the pilgrims' belief as a "grande illusion," a vestigial remain of a "foi primitive" (111, 133). The narrative also anticipates Freud in describing religious sentiment as the effect of a "death instinct," which helps explain Pierre's attraction to the faith:

> Oh! croire de toute son âme, s'abîmer dans la croyance! Il n'y avait sans doute pas d'autre bonheur possible. [Pierre] aspirait à la foi, de toute la joie de sa jeunesse, de tout l'amour qu'il avait eu pour sa mère, de toute l'envie brûlante qu'il éprouvait d'échapper au tourment de comprendre et de savoir, de s'endormir à jamais au fond de la divine ignorance. C'était délicieux et lâche, cet espoir de ne plus être. (66–67)

But the novel constitutes a turning point in Zola's position on religion. As we have seen, the narrative flirts with mysticism (such as in the invisible roses scene) and time and again provides an inside look at Christian faith by "forgetting" its naturalist position. Also, as quoted above, Zola himself acknowledged that one of his primary objectives in writing *Lourdes* was to provide a sympathetic portrayal of Catholicism. While Zola by no means embraced Catholicism, his writings at the time demonstrate that he was repositioning himself with respect to religion, and that during his visits to the shrine he felt that he had indeed experienced something genuine. Toward the end of *Lourdes*, there emerges as a counterweight to the novel's attack on theodicy a hope for a "religion nouvelle," founded on the recognition of the individual's innate religiosity. This religion, which Pierre as Zola's double envisions, stripped of all dogma, would remain open to "l'inconnu" or "le mystère" (442, 574–76).

Rather than perceiving religion solely as a vestige of our primitive past or our childhood mentality that we must labor to slough off, with *Lourdes* Zola comes to imagine us as innately and ineradicably religious beings. In his new understanding of the individual as *homo religiosus*, Zola envisions the creation of a religion of the future that will respond to our "soif du divin," or at least for "le mystère," "le merveilleux," but by channeling it toward the cultivation of paradise on earth. While the novel's expression of such a hope does not lead to the speculation of the details of such a project, what Zola has done is validate religious sentiment all the while inserting it into an overarching positivist ideology of the History of Progress. This shift in position on religion also anticipates Freud's own change in perspective, later in his career, from an understanding of faith in God as a vestige of childhood mentality and as a symptom of neurosis to one that considers religion to be a defining characteristic of human psychology.

Huysmans's *Foules de Lourdes*

Huysmans's own account of Lourdes provides a harsh critique of the positivist vein of Zola's novel. In offering a closer look at the nature of the miracles reported at the shrine, *Les Foules de Lourdes* reaffirms the supernatural and replaces Zola's position on theodicy with a Catholic perspective on human suffering. However, as

Huysmans's defense of Catholicism is triggered by the threatening "other" of Zola's atheism, the narrative is equally marked by "cross-pressures" in which a "fragilized" mystical vision is drawn toward "the other side."

Les Foules de Lourdes (1906) is a piece belonging to Huysmans's post-conversion writings that detail the spiritual journey from unbelief to Catholicism. But whereas *En route* (1895), *La Cathédrale* (1898), and *L'Oblat* (1903) recount Durtal's enduring struggle with questions of faith, *Les Foules* first appears to be firmly anchored in a Catholic mindset. It is Huysmans's most manifestly didactic text, designed to debunk the naturalist interpretation of miracles and outline the role of vicarious suffering in humankind's salvation. As Brian Banks describes it, when Huysmans began composing *Les Foules,* he was working from "a ready-made framework of inner belief regarding the truth of miracles" (134). However, upon closer examination we can observe in *Les Foules de Lourdes* an enduring *va-et-vient* between conviction and doubt that does not always appear to be deliberate, and that remains consistent with the tenor of earlier publications. Accordingly, the act of writing constitutes the medium for the working through of one's faith by which the *je* attains a sense of self-conviction as a believer. It is especially the narrator's skill at casting his observations in a particular light that cements his faith in God. As with Zola, much of what we read in *Les Foules* can be attributed to the deliberate staging of doubt that presents one's *parti pris* in dramatic fashion. The crisis of faith at the center of the plot would seem to serve the specific function of anticipating the text's eventual settling in one world vision. This does not, however, subtract from the authentic nature of the writer's confrontation with matters of faith. Readers familiar with Huysmans's earlier works as well as the novelist's biography of spiritual development—the long and arduous road to religious conversion, the forsaking of "worldly" pleasures for a pious lifestyle of celibacy, and the painstaking decision to become an oblate—will recognize the same existential crisis that inspires the *Foules* narrative. The experience of doubt and angst that punctuate the work delineate a genuine struggle with questions of faith.

The autobiographical nature of *Les Foules de Lourdes* appears even more transparent than the earlier works. Huysmans uncharacteristically chose to use a diegetic narrator who, instead

of possessing a fictitious name such as Des Esseintes or Durtal, remains unidentified. Consequently, the reader is tempted to envision Huysmans himself as the *je* referent. Also, the narrative plot is unusually minimal. Described by Huysmans himself as a compilation of organized sketches and notes, *Les Foules* reads as the author's personal reflections during two visits to the shrine in 1903 and 1904.[14] The narrator spends the majority of the text sharing his thoughts and feelings regarding the pilgrims, the art and architecture of the churches, and the faith healings.

The highly ambivalent and multifaceted portrait of Lourdes lends the text its sincere appearance. This ambivalence is heralded by the narrator's admission in the very first sentence of the main section that he harbors no desire to visit Lourdes (75). Nevertheless, he proceeds to recount his lengthy journey to and passionate investigation of Lourdes. Second, the narrator remains highly unsympathetic toward the eponymous crowds of believers that visit the shrine from across Western Europe. Their sheer numbers offend his ascetic predisposition and enduring search for an ideal monastic retreat. And yet, he is often moved by their faith in the divine. What's more, the vast majority of the architecture and paintings of Lourdes's churches offend the narrator's esthetic sensibilities so much so that he perceives them as inspired by Satan himself. And yet, he begins to perceive this diabolic art as a sign of the shrine's divine nature. According to his reasoning, the Virgin's domain would naturally be accompanied by a satanic assault. And finally, whereas the narrator sets out to reaffirm the existence of miracles, he observes in great anguish that the overwhelming majority of ailing pilgrims do not find healing at the shrine. The depressed narrator ultimately strengthens his belief in God by weaving what he first perceived as an assault on his faith into a treatise on the Catholic belief in the importance of vicarious suffering. He concludes, in fact, by recasting the shrine not as a place of divine healing but of expiatory torment.

It is especially with respect to the passages devoted to faith healings that we observe the narrator's struggle with his own faith, the temptation to draw "impious" conclusions, the encroaching affect of despair, and finally the regaining of faith through recourse to a theological framework on suffering. *Les Foules* reads as an unstable narrative in which the narrator continues to work through his salvation in constant oscillation between skepticism and convic-

tion. Cogny rightfully assesses the text as a book of contradictions, traversed by both certainty and doubt ("un livre si rempli de contradictions, de doutes et de certitudes"), and it is the sincere tone of these contradictions that leads us to bear witness to *Les Foules* as the unfurling of emotive dialogue between unbelief and belief.

Not unlike Zola's novel, *Les Foules de Lourdes* provides an ostensibly definitive framing for a narrative otherwise in relative flux. The first twenty pages serve as a type of preface in which the narrator relays as facts the history of the Virgin's apparitions in Southwestern France. As a way of explaining in advance why ailing pilgrims are not healed at the shrine, the narrator makes reference to the Catholic understanding of the significance of vicarious suffering. According to the tenet of faith, God allows his people to bear physical torment in order to save the souls of the lost, and provide a counterbalance to the evil doings of the worldly: "Beaucoup d'âmes se sont sans doute sacrifiées et rétablissant l'équilibre perdu, ont, à force de souffrances, détourné les cataclysmes" (70). If throughout his reflections, the narrator often becomes depressed and expresses anger toward a God who does not heal the sick, it would seem that this is because he momentarily fails to recall his own belief in mystical substitution by submitting to the temptations of irreligious reasoning. This psychic drifting to "the other side" resembles Zola's narrator who "forgets" the scientific explanation of autosuggestion as the prognosis of Marie's eventual healing.

In *Les Foules de Lourdes*, modern forms of reasoning, including the imperative of direct observation, possess an abiding allure that poses a threat to belief in God. Accordingly, the narrator begins by rejecting any arguments governed by scientific methods:

> Je ne tiens pas à voir des miracles; je sais très bien que la Vierge peut en faire à Lourdes ou autre part; ma foi ne repose ni sur ma raison, ni sur les perceptions plus ou moins certaines de mes sens, elle relève d'un sentiment intérieur, d'une assurance acquise par des preuves internes; n'en déplaise à ces caciques de la psychiatrie et à ces barbacoles entendues, qui ne pouvant rien expliquer, classent sous l'étiquette de l'autosuggestion ou de la démence, les phénomènes de la vie divine qu'ils ignorent, la Mystique est une science résolument exacte; j'ai pu vérifier un certain nombre de ses effets et je n'en demande pas davantage pour croire; cela me suffit. (75)[15]

Here, the narrator legitimates his own experience of the supernatural at Lourdes—which he is about to recount—by falling back on the nature of faith as personal revelation. In doing so, he renders irrelevant any recourse to reason or direct observation. What's more, these prefatory comments appear to address in an anxious tone the theories of "science," namely, the hypothesis of autosuggestion. The use of pejorative terms ("cacique," "barbacole") to disparage the "ignorant" and "incompetent" community of scientists, psychiatrists, and professors conveys an uneasy tenor that betrays the troubled state of the narrator's subject position. And yet, there appear in this same passage signs not only of repulsion but also of attraction to the precepts of science. The narrator in fact adopts the language of the naturalist in claiming to have "verified" the presence of God at Lourdes, and to practice the "exact science" of "la Mystique." This penchant for the scientific is consistent with the methodology that governs the vast majority of the *Foules* narrative. In the style of the naturalist observer, the narrator in fact offers a detailed observation of the physical and social phenomenon that is the Lourdes pilgrimage.[16] Much like Zola's novel drifts from its naturalist thesis and the strict methods of observation to dabble in a mystical rendition of the shrine, Huysmans's *Foules* strays from its mystical overlay to provide a detailed, naturalist manner of documenting what the narrator observes with his physical senses, including the physical manifestations of the pilgrims' illnesses, the conversations among believers, the shrine's daily rituals, the natural surroundings, and the church architecture. Above all, the contradictory movements contained in the brief passage from Huysmans's preface paint a complex picture of a narrative consciousness in flux, under the cross-pressures of religion and secularism.

A significant portion of *Les Foules* resembles an essay by directly repudiating in point-by-point fashion Zola's observations and commentary that place into question the supernatural origin of the Lourdes phenomenon. An important passage on the healing waters of the Grotto is one such instance. Huysmans undoubtedly perceived Zola's description in *Lourdes* of the shrine's infected waters as a challenge to the faith. On two separate occasions, Zola's narrator draws the reader's attention to the waters' contamination:

> Les pères de la Grotte ne faisaient alors changer l'eau des baignoires que deux fois par jour; et, comme il passait dans

> la même eau près de cent malades, on s'imagine quel terrible bouillon cela finissait par être. Il s'y rencontrait de tout, des filets de sang, des débris de peau, des croûtes, des morceaux de charpie et de bandage, un affreux consommé de tous les maux, de toutes les plaies, de toutes les pourritures. Il semblait que ce fût une véritable culture des germes empoisonneurs, une essence des contagions les plus redoutables, et le miracle devait être que l'on ressortît vivant de cette boue humaine. (192–93)

In describing as a "miracle" the observation that the sick are not exiting the polluted pools with even more diseases, the narrator of *Lourdes* delivers the concluding sentence in an ironic tone meant to accentuate the waters' utter contagion. However, the narrator of *Les Foules* takes hold of Zola's jab, empties it of all irony, and claims it as evidence of supernatural intervention:

> L'eau est devenue un hideux bouillon, une sorte d'eau de vaisselle grise, à bulles, et des ampoules rouges et des cloques blanchâtres nagent sur cet étain liquide dans lequel on continue à plonger des gens.
>
> Le miracle permanent de Lourdes est là. […] Les pansements antiseptiques, tant vantés par la chirurgie, sont tout bonnement remplacés, ici, par des compresses d'eau de Lourdes et les plaies ne s'en portent pas plus mal. […] Ici, aucune infection ne se produit, et aucune maladie, si elle n'est guérie, ne s'aggrave […].
>
> Comment, si l'on ne croit pas à une intervention divine, expliquer cette impunité assurée à Lourdes seulement et tant que l'on sera dans la zone protectrice de la Vierge? (96–97)

Like Zola, Huysmans's narrator is writing within the register of modern science—and more specifically Louis Pasteur's recent discovery of the harmful effects of microorganisms. However, whereas Zola's description of the Grotto's germ-infested pools appears to Huysmans's narrator as a blow to the Church's claim of their salutary effects, the latter uses the same observation to argue, on the contrary, the miraculous nature of the spring. This "debate" on the nature of the Lourdes spring that Huysmans enters into with Zola highlights not a neutral position of scientific inquiry, but rather the vulnerable or "fragilized" state of worldview. The use of scientific discourse under the guise of on-site observation serves for both authors as a privileged vehicle for their *parti pris*.

Another point of contestation is Zola's account of a healing of lupus. In *Lourdes*, Elise Rouquet, a minor character inflicted with

the disease, undergoes a gradual and partial healing of the skin. But as Huysmans's narrator points out, Rouquet is inspired by the historical account of Marie Lemarchand who, as the story has been recorded, was instantaneously healed of lupus upon exiting the spring. Consequently, Huysmans's narrator regards the instantaneity of the healing as supernatural intervention. He also signals to the reader that in *Lourdes,* Zola "falsified" the healing's instantaneous nature to appear convincing in dismissing the miracle as a case of neurosis:

> Zola n'a pas voulu avouer cette spontanéité qu'il avait constatée pourtant; il a préféré raconter que l'aspect du visage s'améliorait peu à peu, que la cure s'opérait indolemment; il a inventé des étapes et des gradations pour ne pas être obligé de confesser que cette renaissance soudaine d'une figure détruite était en dehors des lois de la nature humaine; c'eût été l'aveu du miracle.
>
> La question est, en effet, là. Que le lupus, si rebelle à tous les genres de médications, puisse néanmoins disparaître à la longue, c'est très possible […]. [Mais] la nature ne peut fermer une plaie en une seconde, les chairs ne peuvent se restaurer en une minute. Ce qui constitue l'élément du miracle, en pareil cas, c'est moins la guérison que sa promptitude, que son instantanéité.
>
> L'histoire de Marie Lemarchand, telle que l'a relatée Zola, est donc résolument inexacte; préoccupé de fournir des arguments aux adversaires du surnaturel, il insinua, dans son volume, en sus de la lenteur mensongère, que ce lupus pouvait bien être un faux lupus, d'origine nerveuse. […] Mais la vérité est autre —l'origine du lupus de Marie Lemarchand est parfaitement connue, elle a été certifiée par les médecins […]. L'on peut donc affirmer que Mlle Marie Lemarchand est une miraculée vraiment guérie. (116–17)

Here, the narrator conjectures that Zola was less interested in medical truth than in providing arguments on behalf of the atheistic camp ("les adversaires du surnaturel"). This is perhaps the narrator's strongest point, for he appears simply to let the evidence speak for itself. And yet, readers familiar with Zola's novel would be quick to point out that *Les Foules* does not address other passages of *Lourdes* that place into question the reliability of these documented accounts of miracles. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Zola did significantly alter the account, which would further suggest the author's strong feeling of malaise in the face of the

shrine's "miraculous" phenomena as argued in the previous section. Above all, these examples and others[17] demonstrate that in writing *Les Foules*, Huysmans responded to specific challenges posed by Zola's own account of Lourdes.

Many passages of *Les Foules* repeat the tri-part narrative structure of observation, a "fragilization" of subject position, and finally the regaining of faith through recourse to theology. As a result of this particular pattern of narrative micro-structure, the larger framework forms a series of oscillations between faith and doubt. Most often, the subject at hand is the observation that the majority of the pilgrims leave the shrine unhealed. For instance, in the testimony of a service at the Grotto in which no healing occurs, the narrative voice fluctuates between bewilderment, sorrow, empathy, resignation, anger, scorn, and blasphemous reproach. But the negative affects that accompany the sight of human suffering and especially the experience of unbelief are twice negated by the return of the voice of faith (italicized below) that regrounds the narrative consciousness in a Catholic perspective. The following passage, quoted at great length in order to illustrate its narrative vagaries, occurs in a sustained emphatic tone, punctuated numerous times with exclamation points and declarative conjunctions such as *hélas, ah*, and *tout de même*, among many other affective discursive signifiers:

> Ce champ de maladie que nous venons de suivre, cette récolte couchée sous l'averse des maux, me semblent, hélas! bien perdus. Nous sommes arrivés à la moitié de notre course, aux marches du Rosaire, et aucun impotent n'a été, dans un souffle divin, projeté debout.
>
> Là, gisent sur des brancards les grands malades; un homme, dont le visage couleur de feuille sèche, ouvre les yeux; deux tisons, subitement allumés, flambent dans les paupières de cendre. Il fixe avidement la monstrance, puis tout s'éteint: son visage, éclairé une seconde, redevient un visage d'ombre; la femme au mal de Pott, qui baigne dans son pus, n'ouvre même pas les yeux; elle paraît être déjà hors de la terre; d'autres également sont plongés dans le coma et la bouche d'une fillette que l'on essuie, écume; plus loin, dans le rang serré des matelas, je retrouve la petite sœur blanche, la sœur Justinien qui paraît morte, exposée dans son panier comme dans un cercueil.
>
> Ah! j'ai le cœur angoissé, en la voyant. Je ne sais… je crois que celle-là va se dresser, que le ciel va enfin répondre à nos suppliques…

Le Saint-Sacrement l'enveloppe dans la croix de son éclair d'or. Elle demeure inerte et livide… […]

L'on entonne *l'Adoreums in æternum*—et toujours rien ne se produit. […]

Les prières dévalent, se précipitent et aucun malade ne se lève! […]

Le Saint-Sacrement passe toujours et rien ne se montre. On finit par être pris de tentation; les reproches sont prêts à vous jaillir des lèvres. Que fait-Elle, alors qu'il lui serait si facile de guérir tous ces gens? Il y a, malgré tout ce qui peut la choquer, ici, tant de Foi, tant de prières, tant de charité, tant d'efforts, qu'attend-elle?

Cette clairière où l'exorateur rugit ses appels n'est cependant pas vide. Le Christ, Marie et les Anges sont là, qui regardent invisibles, et écoutent, silencieux. Jésus l'a formellement promis: "Là, où deux ou trois sont assemblés en mon nom, je suis au milieu d'eux." Et nous sommes des milliers réunis pour le prier! Pourquoi ne répond-il pas? Et j'ai l'immédiate vision d'un vieux tableau du Jugement dernier à Bruges, d'un Primitif des Flandres, Jan Provost, où le Christ, entouré d'une cour d'anges, s'affirme, terrible, une épée à la main et montre de l'autre la plaie de son cœur à la Vierge qui le supplie à genoux d'épargner les pécheurs; et Elle réplique au geste de courroux, en découvrant la poitrine qui l'allaita, en opposant à son cœur percé par les hommes, son sein.

N'est-ce pas ce qu'Elle doit faire à ce moment-ci?

Et pourtant aucun grabataire n'est allégé. Ici, une femme tend, éperdue, un enfant dont les yeux chavirent dans une face qui se décompose et retombe sur ses genoux, en sanglotant; là, un pauvre homme, aveugle, se tient agenouillé, le chapeau à la main. Il semble demander à Dieu l'aumône et, comme aux autres, Dieu qui passe ne lui donne rien!

C'est vraiment affreux! […]

La foule, les bras en croix, lance furieusement au ciel cette clameur de triomphe, elle sent qu'elle joue son va-tout.

Et le Saint-Sacrement continue sa marche, indifférent, insensible.

Je suis découragé, je n'ai plus envie de prier; cependant je sollicite la guérison du malheureux à la peau boursouflée […].

C'est fini; l'on va quérir les voitures, les civières, ramasser ce bagage de débris humains et le reporter à l'hôpital.

Ah! tout de même! je ne puis m'empêcher de songer à ces malheureux arrivés de si loin, qui ont subi tant de fatigue de chemin de fer qui ne sont pas guéris! Ils vont rentrer dans les funèbres salles, rejoindre leurs lits, exténués par ces transbordements sur des brancards ou dans des attelages. —*Et cependant, je me dis tout bas que ce que nous demandons, ici, à la Vierge, est*

fou! Lourdes a pris, en quelque sorte, le contre-pied de la Mystique, car enfin l'on devrait, devant la grotte, réclamer non la guérison de ses maux, mais leur accroissement; l'on devrait s'y offrir en expiation des péchés du monde, en holocauste!

Lourdes serait donc, si l'on se plaçait à ce point de vue le centre de la lâcheté humaine venue pour notifier à la Vierge le refus d'admettre l'adimpleo quæ desunt passionum Christi *de saint Paul; et l'on pourrait s'étonner alors que la Madone opérât des cures!*

Mais d'abord, en dehors même de la vocation spéciale qui n'est pas donnée à tous d'être des victimes réparatrices, beaucoup, une fois à Lourdes, s'omettent et sollicitent la grâce que des gens plus malades qu'eux guérissent à leur place; beaucoup, nous le savons, proposent de garder leurs souffrances en échange de conversions. Il y a dans le camp de ces grabataires, épurés de la douleur, des abîmes de charité qu'on ignore; et combien désirent la santé moins pour eux que pour les autres, des mères pour pouvoir élever leurs enfants, des jeunes filles pour entrer dans un cloître et servir Dieu, des religieuses pour retourner à leur poste, auprès des infirmes!

Combien aussi dont le rôle propitiatoire est terminé et que la Mère délivre! d'autres, qui ne sont pas guéries une année, le sont l'année suivante, quand leur temps d'expiation est accompli; —et d'autres qui n'ont rien obtenu, à Lourdes même, sont exonérées en rentrant à Paris […].

Il n'y a donc jamais lieu de désespérer, puisque bien souvent le miracle se produit quand on ne l'attendait plus. […]

Nous voulons raisonner et notre pauvre entendement est si borné! nous ne voulons voir à Lourdes que du palpable et du visible! A cette heure où j'étais tenté de reprocher à Notre-Dame de ne pas guérir tant de malheureux, Elle s'occupait certainement de chacun d'eux, agissant au mieux de ses intérêts, sachant que si un tel revenait valide, il perdrait par des sottises le bénéfice assuré de ses souffrances […]. (151–56; emphasis added)

In this passionate monologue, the narrator cannot help but take note that many of the sick pilgrims who visit the shrine are not healed. In sincere admission of his own disappointment, lack of understanding, and despondency, he submits to grieving alongside the sick whose afflictions are not alleviated. At various moments, the narrator is pulled toward the other side, tempted ("pris de tentation") by unbelief. To cope with the immediacy of human suffering, to reinterpret this disturbing scene of divine absence, he retreats to his faith. Precisely at the moment of deepest despair in which the ailing pilgrims receive the body of Christ and no healing transpires, he parries the overwhelming affect of

an encroaching, godless abyss by soliciting religious references of spiritual plenitude.

In the first block of italics, the narrator fills the menacing void of unbelief by quoting Scripture that affirms the presence of God: "Là, où deux ou trois sont assemblés en mon nom, je suis au milieu d'eux." He also conjures up in his mind Jan Provost's *Last Judgment*, a painting replete with angels and divine figures that reassures the viewer of God's command in human affairs. This mental image quickly fades, however, as the narrator cannot help but take notice of a weeping mother, her face in complete decomposition as she carries her suffering child. This pathetic display of infant suffering leads the narrator to the depths of despair once again. As he observes the pilgrims' unchanged physical state at the closure of the service, his senses become utterly depleted ("Je suis découragé; je n'ai plus envie de pleurer"). Then, in a second attempt to cling to his faith in God, the narrator purposefully changes perspective by reconsidering human suffering not as an evil but as a greater good for the Church's benefit. As Robert Ziegler explains, Huysmans is here "recontexualiz[ing] the mystery of evil and suffering" (325). Or rather, Huysmans becomes engaged in the theodicy debate by resorting to an established theological reconciliation of God and the existence of evil. In the face of the reality of evil, the believer has no choice but to reconsider suffering not as something to alleviate but to celebrate as serving a greater good.[18] In the same breath, the narrator, perhaps in an act of existential desperation, considers numerous other responses to God's unresponsiveness, including the possibility that the sick will be healed upon returning home. This would seem to contradict the narrator's understanding of mystical substitution, or the belief that by refusing to heal the sick, the Virgin saves them from subsequently succumbing to a life of perdition. What is made clear is the narrator's desperate attempt to consider any and all theories to shield himself from the cross-pressures of skepticism. All in all, in the breadth of five pages, we catch a glimpse of Huysmans's narrator at the grips of existential angst as he travels back and forth from the depths of despair to the rehabilitation of faith.

In *Les Foules de Lourdes*, innocent suffering presents a great challenge to faith in God. Whereas in *Lourdes*, Rose's death and Gustave's physical ailment constituted welcomed moments of self-grounding in naturalist principles, the sight of suffering children

triggers anxiety for Huysmans's narrator, threatened by the godless abyss. I would like to consider in the case of the de Belley child one such example. In the initial chapters, the narrator becomes dismayed that the Virgin would not heal the pilgrims in whom he took special interest, especially children. However, in the ninth section he rejoices at what he confirms to be the miraculous healing of a young boy whose deformed leg appears straightened, and whose abscessed torso begins to regain its original skin color. No longer in need of his wooden leg cast, the child is seen running barefoot through the halls of the *Bureau de constatations*. The narrator rejoices at the sight of this miracle, which strengthens his faith: "Et moi qui accusais la Vierge de ne pas guérir les maladies auxquelles je m'intéresse! J'ai une vraie joie, ce matin" (161). Upon witnessing the healing, the narrator heads for the hospital chapel where he recites a series of rosary prayers: "Je prends congé de [l'enfant de Belley] et vais réciter une dizaine de chapelets dans la chapelle de l'hôpital" (164). The child's healing relieves the narrator's doubt in a godless universe not only because it effaces the disturbing image of innocent suffering, but also because it would seem to discredit the claims of science that faith healings are the product of autosuggestion:

> Il ne s'agit pas, en l'espèce, d'une grande personne qui peut s'auto-suggestionner, en se persuadant, d'avance, qu'elle sera guérie; il s'agit d'un marmot de sept ou huit ans; et il faut avoir vu baigner des enfants dans la piscine, pour se rendre compte de leur état d'esprit, à ce moment. Ils ne songent pas plus à prier la Vierge qu'à guérir. Ils se débattent en pleurant et en criant, entre les mains des infirmiers qui les tiennent; et, une fois dans l'eau, ils hurlent jusqu'à ce qu'on les en retire!
>
> Quelle suggestion voulez-vous qu'il y ait, dans ces conditions, chez un enfant dont la piété est d'ailleurs souvent nulle? (190)

Quite unlike the case of Marie de Guersaint, whose healing the *Lourdes* narrative attributed to female hysteria and auto-suggestion, the de Belley child would seem to present an unambiguous instance of divine intervention. Above all, the narrator enlists his own observations and conclusions to shore up his worldview.

Greatly emboldened by the boy's healing, the narrator becomes all the more dispirited when only days later he learns that the child has taken ill once again, resigned to his "wagon," and in

a worse state than before: "Il est retombé, paraît-il, plus malade qu'auparavant et on l'a remporté, réintégré, dans son appareil, presque mourant, dans le wagon!" (189). Having learned this unfortunate news while bearing witness to the healing of a young nun who recovered the use of her legs, the narrator feels evermore threatened by an apparently absurd and cruel world: "Rien n'arrive comme on le croit, ici; on vit dans l'imprévu. […] Ici, je ne comprends plus; le miracle acquis ne me surprend pas; mais le miracle, accordé d'une main et retiré de l'autre, me désarçonne; je n'y suis plus du tout" (189). The possibility of an incomprehensible world jolts ("désarçonne") his being. Consequently, the narrator is haunted with questions:

> Comment expliquer l'ironie de ce faux miracle, le mensonge de cette validité factice? Est-ce un piège tendu par le singe de Dieu, le coup renouvelé des fausses voyantes qu'il suscita du temps des apparitions de la Vierge à Bernadette, pour brouiller les cartes, pour jeter le doute sur la certitude des vrais miracles, ou est-ce autre chose, mais quoi alors?
>
> Je confesse que cette histoire est celle qui m'a le plus stupéfié à Lourdes, et plus je la scrute et moins je la comprends. (191–92)

That which the narrator initially acclaimed as divine intervention he now reinterprets as the "cruel irony" of a false miracle, the lie of a fabricated healing that has fomented doubt. Instead of heading for the chapel to sing praises to the Virgin, he exits the hospital in panic-stricken ("affolant") disorientation and contemplates the possibility of a maleficent deity of pitiless parodies: "Je me dis, en sortant de l'hôpital, […qu']il y a encore autre chose, le mystère plus affolant, selon moi, d'un Dieu qui tolère les parodies ou qui se reprend!" (192).

This time, the narrator's recourse to mystical substitution fails to ward off the encroaching abyss of unbelief. In a desperate attempt to account for innocent suffering, he evokes the biblical story of the slaughter of the newborn babies in Bethlehem who, according to the narrator's exegesis, sacrificed their lives to save the Christ child: "Il y a eu substitution: tous les nouveau-nés de Bethléem ont payé pour le Nouveau-Né réfugié en Egypte; des milliers d'innocents, quatorze mille d'après le Canon de la messe des Abyssins et le Calendrier des Grecs, ont été sacrifiés pour un seul" (227). If, according to this interpretation of the Gospels, the

suffering and death of innocent children saved the life of God's son, then, as Huysmans's narrator implies, the enduring afflictions of children could also be interpreted as a holy sacrifice for the benefit of others. And yet, this time the narrator is not satisfied with his explanation. He considers the infant sacrifices at the hands of Herod as, in fact, a debt that Jesus incurred. For Huysmans's narrator, the Son of God remains indebted to children, and therefore should not spare the healing of a single child:

> Et ce sang que nous vous avons aidé à nous donner, pour le salut de notre âme, nous l'avons, nous les premiers, donné pour le salut de votre corps, car enfin les Innocents ont été égorgés à votre place par Hérode! […] C'est une dette cela —une dette contractée par l'Enfant Jésus et que nous pouvons réclamer à l'Homme-Dieu, ici, où, plus que partout ailleurs, le sang déborde des lésions internes et des plaies! (227)

In this passage consisting partially of interior monologue, partially of prayer, the narrator remains disheartened for what would appear to be God's lack of sympathy and goodness toward the suffering pilgrims. He begins to look back at his time at the shrine in which God turned a deaf ear to the prayers and supplications of the faithful: "Et je rêve à ces processions désespérées où Dieu résiste et reste sourd, où l'assaut de nos suppliques échoue. […] Je ne sais si Dieu a au moins amélioré, ce matin, l'état de ces malades, mais il ne les a pas, sûrement, guéris, après leur communion" (227).

Other cases of suffering children also solicit the narrator's sympathy. The painstaking efforts of a mother who sacrificed much to bring her two young sons all the way from South America to Lourdes command his attention:

> Deux [voitures] contiennent des bambins, deux garçons, paralysés de la ceinture aux pieds, veillés par leur mère, une dame de l'Equateur; et, de temps en temps, elle se lève du pliant sur lequel elle est assise, empoigne les deux petits et les jette sur son dos; l'on dirait deux pauvres singes qui grimacent et dont la tête vivante ballotte, d'un côté sur l'épaule et les jambes mortes, de l'autre côté, sur le giron de la mère. […] Ils sont débarqués depuis quelques jours et cette dame ne veut repartir que lorsqu'ils seront guéris. Le seront-ils?
>
> Je ne puis m'empêcher de songer à propos d'elle. J'imagine que, dans son pays, tout le monde la blâma lorsqu'on la vit entreprendre un aussi coûteux et un aussi long voyage; si elle

> revient, après tant de fatigues et de dépenses, bredouille, ce sera vraiment affreux, car tous les gens de soi-disant bon sens triompheront de sa déconvenue et se moqueront d'elle.
>
> Et puis la douleur d'avoir tant espéré, pour ne rien obtenir —le regret même de s'en aller, en se disant que peut-être si on était resté plus longtemps, la Vierge aurait fini par s'émouvoir! il y a de quoi devenir folle!— Mais non, en admettant même que Notre-Dame n'exauce pas ses prières, Elle lui accordera ainsi qu'aux autres, plus qu'aux autres, en échange de tant de foi, la patience et le courage, lui revaudra son échec par d'autres grâces!
>
> C'est égal, je voudrais bien que le Ciel prît en pitié les angoisses de cette malheureuse! (228)

In the conclusion of this passage, the narrator demonstrates such a heightened level of empathy for the children's mother who will make the long journey home to Ecuador disillusioned. He places himself in her shoes as he imagines becoming mad ("Il y a de quoi devenir folle!"). And yet, to protect himself from the encroaching abyss of unbelief, he refuses to believe ("mais non") that the Virgin has not responded to the mother. He seeks to hold tight to his faith by convincing himself that in other ways ("par d'autres grâces") the Virgin is rewarding this mother for her faith. However, not entirely satisfied by this painstaking exercise in the shoring up of faith, the passage concludes with the narrator left wanting the Virgin to heal the boys. The expression "c'est égal" poignantly contrasts the possibility of invisible graces that the narrator imagines the Virgin granting to this family with the narrator's immediate desire for the sons' healing.

It comes as no surprise that, as doubt begins to tighten its grip, the narrator throws into question all "miracles." Who can say whether the health of a healed pilgrim will not, one day, regress to the original malady: "Personne ne peut, en effet, se vanter d'avoir vu un miracle à Lourdes, puisque bien des cures extraordinaires ne résistent pas à l'épreuve du temps et qu'il n'y a pas de miracle, au vrai sens du mot, si le mal n'a fait que s'endormir pour se réveiller après" (236). It is also understandable that toward the end of his stay, the narrator expresses a sense of fatigue, even vertigo. The believer stands at the edge of the abyss in desperate need to regain his footing:

> Je commence à être un peu las. […] Le vertige des excès [me] gagne. […] Ce que j'éprouve surtout, à ce moment-ci, c'est le

> besoin de ne plus bouger. […] Le spectacle que je vois de ma fenêtre, la nouvelle ville couchée dans le fond de cuvette de ses monts ne m'enthousiasme guère. […] Je suis fatigué des pèlerins et las des paysages; je reste donc aujourd'hui dans ma chambre. (245–46)

Here, the image of the narrator retreating to his bedroom resurrects the concluding image of Huysmans's naturalist narrative *Sac au dos* (see Chapter 3) in which the male protagonist seeks refuge from a hostile world of war and dysentery in the material comforts of the hearth: "Je suis chez moi, dans des cabinets à moi! Et je me dis qu'il faut avoir vécu dans la promiscuité des hospices et des camps pour apprécier la valeur d'une cuvette d'eau, pour savourer la solitude des endroits où l'on met culotte bas, à l'aise" (140). The repetition of the image of the "cuvette" is intriguing. In *Sac au dos*, one's personal basin of water as the sole source of existential compensation serves to underscore the nihilism fueling the narrative. In *Les Foules*, the "cuvette" reappears as a natural water basin formed by a valley of the Pyrenees adjacent to the shrine. That this natural appendage to the miraculous springs fails to stir the narrator's soul further highlights his utter despair.

Not unlike the conclusion of *Lourdes* that returns to a naturalist perspective on the shrine, in *Les Foules* the believer appears to regain footing in his faith immediately before the narrative's close. First, he clings once more to the entrenching discourse of theodicy, namely, the theological notion of mystical substitution, in order to reassert God's existence and the Virgin's reign at Lourdes, even despite the pilgrims' enduring physical sufferings. To do so, he provides a profoundly uncommon understanding of the shrine, all the while falling back on a Catholic interpretation of human agony. Rather than perceive Lourdes as a place of divine healing, he presents the Grotto as a sacred site of expiatory suffering for the world's salvation:

> Lourdes est une cité de noctambules qui compensent, par les excès de leur pieux surmenage, les excès peccamineux des noctambules des autres villes. Il sied d'avouer que si le Démon s'abat sur ce lieu de pèlerinages, ainsi que sur tous les sanctuaires voués à la Vierge, la défense des fidèles y est acharnée et que pour une chute consentie dans l'ombre, il y a des centaines de conversions acquises par ces oraisons esseulées, par ces élans solitaires qui se produisent justement à ces heures tardives où la Madone n'en a plus. (186)

Here, *Les Foules* entirely abandons the naturalist principles of observation and documentation. To uphold his faith, the narrator proceeds to assume that conversions in other cities take place during, and as a direct consequence of, such moments of suffering and supplication at the Grotto.

Disillusioned by the impossibility of confirming divine intervention at Lourdes, the narrator resorts to the seventeenth-century case of Pierre de Rudder, an extra-Lourdes healing. In the conclusion, he recounts the instantaneous healing of de Rudder's leg after praying to the Virgin. As attested by historians, twenty years after the healing, and confirmed by autopsy upon his death, de Rudder's leg remained in its healed state. It is this historical case, in fact, that, in the narrator's eyes, definitively dismisses Zola's theory of autosuggestion:

> Cette autopsie d'un miracle est certainement la preuve la plus extraordinaire qui ait jamais pu être fournie d'une action surnaturelle remédiant à l'impuissance humaine dans les guérisons d'ici-bas. Les plaies nerveuses de Zola, l'autosuggestion, la foi qui guérit, toutes les vieilles fariboles des écoles de la Salpêtrière et de Nancy, sont réduites à rien, du coup. (250)

At the end of an essay manifestly on Lourdes, recourse to a case of divine healing from another time and another place to confirm divine healings only further highlights the affect of anxiety that fueled the working through of faith. The *Foules* text demonstrates that the reaffirmation of belief in God involves the relentless process of self-convincing.

To recall, *Les Foules*'s prefatory comments asserted that Catholic faith relies neither on reason nor on observation, but rather on an interior feeling ("sentiment intérieur"), a certainty acquired by internal proofs ("une assurance acquise par des preuves internes"; 75). In the final paragraphs, the narrator returns to the premises of faith by insisting on God's opacity. The truth is that there is no law upon which to judge the validity of belief in God, for he acts as he pleases: "La vérité est qu'il n'y a aucune règle, que la Vierge guérit qui, où et comme Elle veut" (266). It would seem, in fact, that this line of reasoning, which deflects all contestation, is the inevitable conclusion for a believer who, in refusing to yield to total disillusionment and under the cross-pressures of skepticism, seeks at all costs to remain steadfast in the faith. Whereas the entire

text portrays a believer plagued by the fear of God's nonexistence, the narrator closes by claiming that if men of science refuse to acknowledge miraculous healings, it is because they are afraid of believing ("la peur de la Foi"; 269).

The countless contradictions in *Les Foules de Lourdes* make sense within a discussion of the cross-pressures of belief and unbelief. On the one hand, the narrator begins the story of his stay at Lourdes by expressing his lack of desire to visit the shrine: "Si quelqu'un n'a jamais été stimulé par le désir de voir Lourdes, c'est bien moi" (75). However, throughout the narrative the believer demonstrates a keen curiosity for everything about Lourdes. And whereas the narrator begins by discrediting reason in the confirmation of faith, he does nothing throughout the narrative if not observe, document, and attempt to draw conclusions regarding God from what he witnesses with his senses. Much like interior passages of Zola's naturalist novel demonstrate an attraction to the mystical, the core of Huysmans's *Foules* constitutes a sustained forsaking of the premises of mysticism and revelation to stare in the face an encroaching godless universe all the while it desperately attempts to maintain faith. The final return to the mystery of divine revelation as ultimate authority is what essentially distinguishes Huysmans and other Catholic and mystic writers of *fin-de-siècle* France from the positivist trend in French literature of the time, and that continues in the tradition of Jansenists such as Pascal and their antecedents. Only by falling back on the notion of mystery does Huysmans's believer turn away from the threatening allure of positivist reasoning to regain his identity as a man of faith.

Our discussion of the attributes of Huysmans's "writing on faith" may now allow us to consider Zola's narrative as similarly placing a "wager" on one world vision. Often, Zola's work reads as a declaration of "faith" in science. And here, Zola is inconsistent. On the one hand, he has faith that one day science will progress to the point that it will be able to account for so many phenomena in nature that it currently cannot explain. In witnessing a number of miracles, Pierre's reaction is that "évidemment, des forces mal étudiées encore, ignorées mêmes, agissaient" (214). The implication is that one day science will discover hidden neurological forces responsible for faith healings. This remark uncannily resembles the place accorded to mystery in *Les Foules*. On the other hand, Zola seems unable at times to tolerate the "unknown." As

Huysmans and scholars have noted, Zola alters historical accounts out of intolerance for the unexplainable in order to reinterpret alleged miracles according to contemporary medical theory on neurosis. Cécile Balavoine has aptly pointed out this inconsistency in Zola's novel between faith in science and deliberate alteration of observed phenomena and recorded cases:

> C'est la façon dont va s'exprimer la volonté acharnée d'atteindre un futur utopique où la science disposerait des moyens d'expliquer avec certitude le miracle qui nous intéresse. Car c'est au nom d'une vérité scientifique future dont il ne dispose pas encore, mais qu'il pense être un jour capable d'expliquer le miracle, que Zola va paradoxalement falsifier la réalité. (63)

For Balavoine, this paradox betrays a feeling of malaise that Zola encountered when faced with faith healings: "C'est ce malaise de Zola face au phénomène du miracle qui certainement justifie son acharnement à vouloir l'expliquer à tout prix" (64). And finally, Balavoine interprets Zola's compromise of scientific principles to explain the unexplainable "at all costs" as driven by doubt itself: "Zola s'embourbe, se perd, compromet sa propre méthode de travail en falsifiant la réalité, en allant au-delà de la science, dans sa rage de démontrer l'absurdité du miracle. Mais cette rage n'est-elle pas justement le signe d'un doute?" (335). If we recognize Pierre as Zola's fictional double—as many scholars have argued—then we can understand the character's doubts about both science and religion articulated throughout the novel as a glimpse into a brief time in the career of an author who, if not consciously questioning this position on science and religion, certainly was working through it in literary form.

At a time when both religious and scientific worldviews reached an apogee, when writers of both sides were caught in the crosswinds of opposing forces, thereby responding to the need to defend their position, it is no wonder that their writings appear as "works of faith." In these cases, the modern text takes shape through the mustering of evidence ostensibly to convince the reader, but even more importantly to convince itself. At the same time, the "staging of doubt" at the core of Zola's and Huysmans's works provides the very pretext for an investigation of the opposing epistemological framework.

Chapter Five

Religious and Secular Conversions

Transformations in Céline's Medical Perspective on Evil

With the publication of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), Louis-Ferdinand Céline proposed a thoroughly secular vision of the human condition. In its unsettling depiction of an utterly disenchanted world, the cynical and dispirited narrator embarks on a sequence of "nocturnal journeys," a metaphor for life itself bereft of all forms of transcendence. Céline continues the naturalist tradition of examining evil through the lens of evolving medical theories. If there is no redemption for the human race, it is because the individual, as constituted of decomposing molecules and as the host of ubiquitous, pathological agents, lives in the shadow of impending death. But Céline's medical perspective forms part of a larger commentary on early twentieth-century concerns complicit in the individual's physical and moral corruption, including urbanization, the mechanization of human labor, and total war. Only a few years after the publication of *Voyage*, and as a manifestation of the rising fascist movement in France, Céline's sudden turn from a brazen secularity to embrace an unabashed, prosaic anti-Semitism steeped in Judeo-Christian imagery and myth, suggests a complex struggle between religious and secular modes of thought. As we have seen in Baudelaire, Zola, and Huysmans, Céline's competing worldviews take shape within a sustained reflection on the question of evil. The writer's literary trajectory illustrates in dramatic fashion that how an author copes with the reality of evil largely determines the extent and sustainability of secularity.

Céline's nihilistic vision of Being as a futile succession of "nights" was likely born in the writer's early adulthood experience of warfare. In the introductory pages of his first novel, the individual's encounter with death in the trenches lays bare the brute nature of a human condition deprived of any redeeming qualities

and driven by the death instinct. Ferdinand Bardamu, the diegetic narrator of *Voyage* who enlists as a soldier in the French army, is immediately deployed to the Western Front where he reflects on the unredeeming nature of humanity: "Qui aurait pu prévoir avant d'entrer vraiment dans la guerre, tout ce que contenait la sale âme héroïque et fainéante des hommes? A présent, j'étais pris dans cette fuite en masse, vers le meurtre en commun, vers le feu… Ça venait des profondeurs" (17).[1] The crucial lesson encountered in the trenches that death is the only truth that we can extract from life looms throughout the novel: "La vérité de ce monde, c'est la mort" (200).

The theoretical foundation of Céline's secularity lies in his understanding of human biology, which he formed while completing his studies in medicine. Bardamu, as a medical practitioner, perceives the human essence as above all biological. The depiction of characters as decomposing organisms leaves no room for speculation on the soul, God, or an afterlife. The biological materialism of *Voyage* is clearly illustrated when a priest pays Bardamu a visit at his clinic. While Father Protiste attempts to engage the doctor in a discussion about God, the narrative only relays Bardamu's thoughts about the priest's physical appearance and poor health, thereby muting the abbot's speech:

> Un soir, comme ma salle d'attente était presque vide, un prêtre entra pour me parler […]. Pendant qu'il parlait prudent et préliminaire, j'essayais de me représenter tout ce qu'il exécutait chaque jour ce curé pour gagner ces calories […]. Il avait des dents bien mauvaises, l'Abbé, rancies, brunies et haut cerclées de tartre verdâtre, une belle pyorrhée alvéolaire en somme. J'allais lui en parler de sa pyorrhée mais il était trop occupé à me raconter des choses. Elles n'arrêtaient pas de venir juter les choses qu'il me racontait contre ses chicots sous les poussées d'une langue dont j'épiais tous les mouvements. A maints minuscules endroits écorchée sa langue sur ses rebords saignants. (335–36)

The passage's exclusive focus on the clinical manifestations of Protiste's oral hygiene in a diagnosis of tooth decay and gum disease impedes the reader from becoming privy to the priest's talk of spiritual matters. Whatever philosophy we can glean from the pages of *Voyage*, it is contingent on what Bardamu understands to be the putrid nature of human biology. Paradoxically, on the rare occasion that Bardamu employs a religious vocabulary, it is

ironically to further underscore decomposing flesh as the common denominator of human existence. This is especially apparent in the conclusions that Bardamu draws on human destiny during Protiste's discussion of the afterlife: "Décidément nous n'adorons rien de plus divin que notre odeur […]. Ce corps à nous, travesti de molécules agitées et banales, tout le temps se révolte contre cette farce atroce de durer. Elles veulent aller se perdre nos molécules, au plus vite, parmi l'univers ces mignonnes!" (337).[2]

Whereas Céline's depiction of the human condition leaves little room for speculation on the spiritual, evil remains a primary issue. Céline's secularity is anchored in its underlying opposition to theodicy; the ubiquity of evil and human suffering annuls any search for spiritual redemption. In a decisive passage of *Voyage* in which Bardamu is unable to save the life of a young boy, the reader joins the narrator in facing the harsh reality of innocent suffering. At Bébert's death, the physician loses any last glimmer of hope in God's existence or the goodness of life. Whereas children may afford us the illusion of a bright future, with the passing of a child, life becomes overshadowed by our impending death. In this bleak outlook, existence is revealed to be a sluggish "death on the installment plan."[3] Bardamu extrapolates from the loss of Bébert the utter emptiness ("le vide") of human existence: "Il me semblait qu'il n'y avait rien pour [Bébert] sur la terre […]. C'est peut-être pour tout le monde la même chose d'ailleurs, dès qu'on insiste un peu, c'est le vide" (286). The secularity of Céline's early novels rests on the narrator's constant confrontation with the sufferings and injustices that prove to be the substance—or rather, that uncover the emptiness—of life. In turn, apprehension of the void that constitutes the exterior world ultimately threatens the self's integrity:

> Toujours j'avais redouté d'être à peu près vide, de n'avoir en somme aucune sérieuse raison pour exister. A présent j'étais devant les faits bien assuré de mon néant individuel. Dans ce milieu trop différent de celui où j'avais de mesquines habitudes, je m'étais à l'instant comme dissous. Je me sentais bien près de ne plus exister, tout simplement. […] Plus rien ne m'empêchait de sombrer dans […] une manière d'effroyable catastrophe d'âme. Une dégoûtation. (204)

Bardamu's confrontation with the void conveys an uneasy sense of existential dissolution, of the catastrophic, and of abiding disgust.

Appearing numerous times throughout the narrative, "le vide" communicates an abiding anxiety at the foundation of a secular perception of human experience.

Céline not only chronicled the evils of the human condition, he also became a symbol of evil.[4] In lengthy, anti-Semitic pamphlets,[5] Céline's attribution of modern social ills to an international Jewish conspiracy made him an object of hate for members of the French Resistance as well as for literary scholars and intellectuals up to this day.[6] In many respects, Céline's vision of evil in the pamphlets constitutes a curious inversion of that of his novels. At its root, anti-Semitism is a way of perceiving—and, ultimately, of coping with—evil. It ascribes the decadence of society to a single malefic source—the Jew. This "many-to-one" ratio fuels the impetuous rant of *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (1937). In his first pamphlet, Céline attributes what he recognizes as the dissolution of modern French society—financial insecurity, unemployment, decline in morality, corruption of "true art," "feminization," and the imminent threat of world war—to one culprit: "C'est toujours d'un Juif qu'il s'agit…" (45). In a classic example of scapegoating, the anti-Semite blames the world's tragedies on a Jewish conspiracy: "Il faut apprendre, sous peine de demeurer plus sot, plus opaque, plus crédule qu'un veau dans sa première semaine, à repérer la marque, la trace, l'emprise, l'initiative des Juifs, dans tous les chambardements du monde, où qu'ils s'effectuent… en Europe, en Amérique, en Asie…" (124).

The "many-to-one" scapegoating dynamic that fuels Céline's vision of evil in his pamphlets remains entirely foreign to *Voyage*. In a key passage that recounts Bardamu's journey through an adversarial world, the narrator boards the *Amiral-Bragueton*, a large ship headed for Africa. A group of French government employees, initially irritated by the sultry climate, direct their irrational anger toward the outsider—Bardamu—the sole passenger who has boarded the ship for his own sake, to begin a new life in the colonies: "Moi, seul payant du voyage, je fus trouvé par conséquent, dès que cette particularité fut connue, singulièrement effronté, nettement insupportable" (113).[7] The other passengers begin to suspect Bardamu of any number of acts (pimping, pederasty, the use of cocaine) deemed immoral by contemporary society, and conspire to plot his murder. Bardamu astutely realizes that he

has been designated to play the legendary role of the scapegoat, the foreigner who has threatened the moral and social order, and whose death is sought for the crowd's appeasement: "Je tenais, sans le vouloir, le rôle de l'indispensable 'infâme et répugnant saligaut' honte du genre humain qu'on signale partout au long des siècles, dont tout le monde a entendu parler" (114–15).

This passage proleptically confirms René Girard's theory that locates the origin of human violence in the crowd's irrational and destructive impulse to designate a scapegoat as the source of evil.[8] It contrasts Bardamu's innocence with the murderous instincts of the "diaboliques passagers":

> Scène de haut carnage […]. Il est périlleux de faire attendre longtemps les corridas. J'étais la bête. Le bord entier l'exigeait, frémissant jusqu'aux soutes […]. Autour de moi tout était accablant de haine et d'ennui […]. [Ils] avaient fait le serment, verre en main, de me gifler à la première occasion, et de me balancer par-dessus bord ensuite. (116, 118)

This description of the crowd's violent impulse to throw Bardamu overboard resembles a similar yet inverse image in *Bagatelles*, in which "M. Céline" speaks of "un Juif" who has caused the world's deluges, and who has thrown the whole of humanity from his ark into the drowning waters: "C'est sûrement un Juif […] qui nous a valu le Déluge, tous les Déluges. Le Juif fait noyer tout le monde, lui saute dans l'Arche et sauve sa peau" (133). By designating a single agent of evil, Céline the pamphleteer aligns himself with the enraged crowd that Bardamu in *Voyage* had denounced. This remarkably neat inversion highlights the pamphlet's diametrical opposition to the novel in its perception of outsiders, and thereby underscores contrasting visions of evil in Céline's writings. It should be noted that in both passages, the first-person narrator casts himself as the victim of evil. What does remain a constant throughout Céline's writings is the reality of evil and the constant force that it exerts on the narrator. This abrupt shift in Céline's understanding of evil's perpetrators from human nature to a single scheming culprit (the Jew) is indicative of a change in Céline's manner of coping with the reality of suffering and human wickedness.

Another significant difference between Céline's opposing visions of evil is the pamphlets' retreat from secularity in the embrace of

a quasi-religious mind frame. As scholars have pointed out, anti-Semitic thought, in the manner in which it presents its beliefs, resembles a religion. In *Céline*, Philippe Muray states the following:

> Il peut paraître étrange de dire que l'antisémitisme de l'"athée" Céline est une religion venant occuper le néant religieux ouvert par son écriture. Les choses s'éclairent si l'on précise que l'antisémitisme n'est pas une religion entre autres, mais *la religion*, l'unique, la seule "révélée" aux hommes parce qu'autorévélée, chuchotée et prophétisée au cœur même de leur histoire, et qui brasse en elle bien des choses appelées religions, les paganismes évidemment mais aussi certains éléments des monothéismes. L'antisémitisme est peut-être la seule religion dont il eût fallu inscrire l'histoire sous la rubrique histoire des religions. (104)

Indeed, by presenting his text as the "revelation" of self-evident truths, the pamphleteer casts himself as prophet. But the religious element of a text such as *Bagatelles* goes beyond its revelatory style. By unmasking the Jew as the source of social decadence, Céline abandons his modern vision of evil for a pre-modern and essentially Christian one. The pamphlet shares with Christian theology and especially medieval myth the belief in a single incarnation of evil. Céline's Jew simply takes the place of the Christian's Satan as the convenient scapegoat. Like the Jew, the devil is at once absent from Céline's novels and a central figure in the pamphlet ("Le diable est partout"; *Bagatelles* 213).

A theoretical shift in medical theory constitutes yet another significant difference between Céline's two visions of evil. Whereas the worldview of the early novels is founded on modern medical theory, and more specifically Louis Pasteur's discoveries of microorganisms' harmful effects, in the pamphlets Céline abandons modern science for an outdated, nineteenth-century medical tradition rooted in physiognomic thought, the typing of bodies, and "pathological anatomy," which ascribes moral behavior to particular bodily traits. Accordingly, in the transition from the novels to the pamphlets, the body as primary victim of an unsanitary world environment becomes the agent of destruction. In this chapter, we will consider this change in medical theory alongside other "inversions" in Céline's work mentioned above. I will ask whether or not this series of shifts from secularity to religiosity, from one medical perspective to another, and ultimately from one vision of evil to

another—which can sometimes be appropriately designated as inversions, sometimes as regressions—evidences a "conversion" in Céline's psychology.

In highlighting what I perceive as a fundamental dichotomy in Céline's oeuvre, I follow a widely accepted path in Céline studies that differentiates the writer's novels from the pamphlets.[9] Godard, the leading scholar of this tradition, has argued that the reactionary ideology of Céline's pamphlets is foreign to his earlier novels: "Si *Mort à crédit* ouvre la voie aux pamphlets qui lui font suite dans la production de Céline, ce n'est pas par l'idéologie qui y pointerait."[10] Godard has consistently asserted the absence of reactionary sentiment in Céline's novels in order to underline the novelist's revolutionary poetics and humanitarian themes.[11] While Godard concedes that Céline harbored anti-Semitic sentiment throughout his writing career, he describes its status in *Voyage* and *Mort à crédit* (1936) as dormant rather than as covert (*Henri Godard présente "Voyage"* 34). From Godard's perspective, Céline's act of writing necessarily filtered out elements (such as racial prejudice) that proved unfavorable to creativity: "Quelque chose, dans l'écrivain, fait un tri de ce qui peut favoriser la création et de ce qui peut lui nuire" (*Céline, scandale* 121). Muray takes a similar position by explaining that the absence of anti-Semitic ideology in Céline's novels stems from an *a priori* incompatibility between literature and racism (164).

Other scholars have tried to account for what they argue is only an apparent disparity between the novels and the pamphlets. In a study of the writer's correspondence, Philippe Alméras concludes that Céline was an anti-Semite throughout his life, and attempts to uncover in *Voyage* underlying signs of hatred of the Jews.[12] But while Alméras presents convincing biographical evidence of the author's pre-pamphlet—indeed pre-*Voyage*—anti-Semitism, he does not provide compelling proof of hidden anti-Semitic messages *within* the early novels. In the five-hundred-page *Voyage*, Alméras isolates three obscure phrases that can be understood as anti-Semitic, but only retrospectively, in light of the ideology expressed in Céline's later pamphlets.[13] Marie-Christine Bellosta similarly argues that "il n'y a pas plusieurs Céline, ni de Céline 'avant Céline,' comme on a pu l'écrire" (285). While not insisting on a specifically anti-Semitic ideology in *Voyage*, Bellosta sets out to show that "l'œuvre de Céline forme un ensemble cohérent du

point de vue de la pensée et de la posture [réactionnaire] du locuteur" (285). She undertakes the ambitious task of teasing out, through a series of close readings, the pre-fascist ideology of *Voyage*. She bases her conclusions on what she interprets as the novel's pessimistic moralism, that is to say, its abstention from presenting a means of emancipation from oppressive society. In following Bellosta's terminology, I would argue that the notion of *pre*-fascist ideology should remain distinct from *fascist* ideology. More importantly, Bellosta's study appears simply not to appreciate Céline's nihilism. That which she consistently interprets with a negative slant, others may admire as the author's courageous confrontation with what he genuinely believed to be the void at the heart of existence. The bigger question here is whether the unmitigated nihilism such as that of *Voyage* bears a level of intensity that the self cannot indefinitely sustain.

The study of evil in Céline's novels and pamphlets has led me to draw conclusions that are quite different from those of Alméras and Bellosta, and that are corroborated by Godard and Muray. Céline's depiction of evil in his early novels is different in essence from that of the pamphlets, and is linked to a marked shift from one medical tradition to another. The novels' radical nihilism, highly dissimilar to anti-Semitic ideology, proves so unnerving that it cannot sustain itself indefinitely but rather gives itself up to other ideological forces. While aligning myself primarily with the first camp, my argument also recognizes the importance of implications made by scholars of the second camp. As with the case of Huysmans, Céline's conversion to anti-Semitism involves the reconciliation of longstanding, contradictory forces within the ego. I will consider, for instance, the role of dance and the figure of the ballerina in the early novels as portending Céline's move to abandon his nihilist vision by sublimating Being. It is important to note that Céline's lamentable attempts at sublimation through anti-Semitism were preceded by the writer's serious if short-lived aspiration to stage ballets. In the sense that elements of *Voyage* evidence psychic conflict, a latent desire of beauty within a rotting world, and a narrative consciousness that has not fully accepted its own apprehension of the human condition, we can certainly speak of continuity between the novels and the pamphlets.

In attributing Céline's diametrically opposed worldviews to marked fluctuations in how to cope with evil, my approach per-

haps most closely resembles Kristeva's assessment of literature as a coming to terms with our own abjection,[14] as well as James's understanding of conversion as assisting the psyche in grappling with human suffering. In orchestrating the theories of Kristeva and James, I discuss Céline's anti-Semitism as a type of conversion that functions as a regrettable way of coping with evil, of sublimating the human putrescence. All in all, a comparison of the novels and the pamphlets illustrates that how Céline copes with evil, and I aver that in Céline it is always about coping with evil, has a direct bearing on the secularity or religiosity of the texts.

Bardamu's Medical Perspective on Evil

The *Amiral-Bragueton* passage presents a forceful illustration of human nature's destructive impulses. Throughout his works, Céline holds the individual responsible for the tragedies that befall him. As he states in his anti-Communist tract *Mea culpa* (1936), "L'Homme est la pire des engeances!… qu'il fabrique lui-même sa torture dans n'importe quelles conditions" (25).[15] But while for Céline violence is an inherent part of human nature, it has never been as prevalent as in the twentieth century. The writer's depiction of modern times gives the impression that humankind has accelerated toward self-destruction. The theme of the apocalypse is heralded in the first pages of *Voyage* when Bardamu, faced with the terrifying reality of war, states: "Décidément, je le concevais, je m'étais embarqué dans une croisade apocalyptique" (14). But the narrator's "journey to the end of the night" does not end on Armistice Day; it continues into the "peacetime" years in other guises. By beginning with the soldier's horrific experiences, *Voyage* announces the advent of a dark era that is marked, above all, by physical suffering. In this section, I will look closely at Céline's depiction of industrialization and urbanization as oppressive, modern forces that have plunged the world into darkness. As we will see, Céline's vision of human nature as inherently destructive does not preclude him from categorizing the modern times as especially evil, and perceiving modern forms of evil as independent forces that surpass the scope of human volition. For Céline, we have given life to destructive mechanisms that, in taking on a life of their own, have ultimately turned against us.

Céline's novels illustrate how the magnitude and complexity of phenomena such as modern warfare, industrialization, and

urbanization make it difficult to attribute the evils of modernity to a single agent, and to speak in terms of intention, fault, or responsibility. In *Voyage*, evil's secularization is intertwined with a critique of subjectivity and the notion of agency central to the theological concept of free will. In Chapter 3, we saw how Zola's fiction emphasized uncontrollable biological drives at the expense of human agency. Similarly, Céline often regards the factor of agency as irrelevant in the diagnosis of modern social ills. His characters are portrayed as the victims not of a malicious evil-doer but of a new *condition,* of impersonal, modern forces. The description of war in *Voyage* is a good example. While war novels commonly identify the "enemy" as those positioned beyond the trenches, Bardamu perceives the soldiers on both sides of the war as the victims of a larger, diffuse, and undifferentiating force that leads millions to slaughter each other: "La guerre […] cette foutue énorme rage qui poussait la moitié des humains, aimants ou non, à envoyer l'autre moitié vers l'abattoir" (50).[16] In *Voyage*, evil is more a question of identifying victims, than of pointing fingers at the Germans or the French. Bardamu reduces his combat experience to the description of suffering: "tout devenait souffrance" (35).

Céline's depiction of total war forms part of a broader critique of modernization that rethinks the nature of evil and its relationship to physical suffering. In the novel's middle sections, Bardamu, as a practicing physician in the working-class neighborhood of Rancy, encounters multiple cases of domestic violence, animal and child abuse, poisoning, and murder. Yet, he perceives the *Ranciers* not as immoral but as sick and in need of medical care.[17] In fact, he appears to diagnose the entire community as ill: "Les malades ne manquaient pas" (264). Everyone coughs: "Tout le monde toussait dans ma rue" (241). Many residents, including their doctor, exhibit symptoms of tuberculosis: "Je prenais plutôt l'air d'une espèce de tuberculeux à mon tour" (265). To make matters worse, the *Ranciers* are hosts to various types of parasites—fleas, bedbugs, and mites.

In his diagnoses, the narrator presents Paris's working-class communities as the victims of their environment. Throughout the Rancy sequence, Bardamu links his patients' illnesses to factory effluvium and unsanitary conditions caused by urbanization: "Tout le monde toussait dans ma rue […]. Pour voir le soleil, faut monter au moins jusqu'au Sacré-Cœur, à cause des fumées […].

Les premiers vents du sud passaient sur Rancy, ceux aussi qui rabattent toutes les suies des usines sur les croisées des fenêtres" (241, 276). Urbanization contributes to the poor health of the Rancy community, as a once well-aired countryside has given way to the construction of countless apartment complexes. Built one against another, they suffocate the inhabitants of the few remaining houses:

> Entre la rue Ventru et la Place Lénine, c'est plus guère que des immeubles locatifs. Les entrepreneurs ont pris presque tout ce qu'il y avait encore là de campagne […]. Coincés entre les bâtisses, moisissent ainsi quelques pavillons résistants […]. C'est des pavillons de rentiers, ceux qui restent. Dès qu'on entre chez eux on tousse à cause de la fumée. (247)

During house calls, Bardamu condemns the moldy atmosphere created by the recent erection of tall houses that surround the residences:

> En entrant, ça sentait chez les Henrouille, en plus de la fumée, les cabinets et le ragoût. […] Les murs du pavillon se gardaient encore bien secs autrefois quand l'air tournait encore tout autour, mais à présent que les hautes maisons de rapport le cernaient, tout suintait l'humide chez eux, même les rideaux qui se tâchaient en moisi. (247, 251)

As a result of bad ventilation and the absence of sunlight, Rancy's narrow and deep passageways reek of rotten food and human feces: "L'été aussi tout sentait fort. Il n'y avait plus d'air dans la cour, rien que des odeurs. C'est celle du chou-fleur qui l'emporte facilement sur toutes les autres. Un chou-fleur vaut dix cabinets, même s'ils débordent. C'est entendu. Ceux du deuxième débordaient souvent" (268). In *Mort à crédit*, Céline's second novel, the doctor-narrator similarly describes the urban neighborhood of his childhood as a place of utter contagion, in which the dirt and humidity of the streets facilitate the spread of infectious microbes:

> [Notre rue] est fait[e] pour qu'on crève lentement mais à coup sûr […]. C'est plus infect qu'un dedans de prison. […] Le soleil arrive si moche qu'on l'éclipse avec une bougie. Tout le monde s'est mis à suffoquer. [Notre rue] devenait conscient[e] de son ignoble asphyxie! […] On ne pensait plus que par microbes et aux désastres de l'infection. (72)

And it is due to such unsanitary living conditions that the residents of the city become inflicted with parasites:

> Bébert […] il se grattait […] Des puces j'en avais moi aussi, attrapé pendant la nuit au-dessus des malades. (242)
>
> [L']enfant Thérèse se blessait à en suppurer de furoncles, tellement qu'elle se démangeait sans cesse sous les puces et les punaises. C'est vrai qu'on était tellement piqué chez eux mes concierges, qu'en entrant dans leur loge on aurait dit qu'on pénétrait dans une brosse […]. (347)

While the *Ranciers* suffer from a range of illnesses, some of which are microbial and contagious in nature, others of which are transmitted by proximity or caused by air pollution, the narrative attributes all to urbanization. Céline's novels depict the modern city as above all a place of bodily suffering. In a poetic passage of *Mort à crédit*, Paris's upward and outward growth is described as if it were at once the instrument and the expression of the city dweller's swelling pain: "Par ma fenêtre on voit Paris… En bas ça s'étale… Et puis ça se met à grimper… vers nous… vers Montmartre… Un toit pousse un autre, *c'est pointu, ça blesse, ça saigne* le long des lumières, des rues en bleu, en rouge, en jaune…" (42; emphasis added). As the corporeal nature of this image conflates physical suffering with urbanization, the cityscape also erases the distinction between subject and object. Urbanization is featured as both the inflictor and the inflicted of bodily pain. By diagnosing chronic illnesses as the symptoms of urban living, Céline portrays the body as the immediate victim of modernization.

Various passages of *Voyage* also illustrate the violent impact of industrialization and mechanization on human life. Factory operations literally shake the Rancy community: "Tout le quartier tremblote […] au ronron continu de la nouvelle usine" (298). In fact, the vibrations cause houses to crumble away:

> Tout à côté du pavillon des Henrouille besognait à présent une petite usine avec un gros moteur dedans. On en tremblait dans leur pavillon du matin au soir. Et puis d'autres fabriques encore un peu plus loin, qui pilonnaient sans arrêt, des choses qui n'en finissaient pas, même pendant la nuit. "Quand elle tombera la bicoque, on n'y sera plus!" […] C'était vrai que le plafond s'égrenait déjà sur le plancher en menus gravats. (326–27)

Rancy's "shaking" echoes back to the "tremblements" of the Ford motor plant that Bardamu had previously visited in Detroit. In this episode, the narrator describes the factory machines as a daily assault on the worker's mind and body:

> Tout tremblait dans l'immense édifice et soi-même des pieds aux oreilles possédé par le tremblement, il en venait des vitres et du plancher et de la ferraille, des secousses, vibré de haut en bas. On en devenait machine aussi soi-même à force et de toute sa viande encore tremblotante dans ce bruit de rage énorme qui vous prenait le dedans et le tour de la tête et plus bas vous agitant les tripes et remontait aux yeux par petits coups précipités, infinis, inlassables. […] On se laisse aller aux machines avec les trois idées qui restent à vaciller tout en haut derrière le front de la tête. C'est fini […] On existait plus que par une sorte d'hésitation entre l'hébétude et le délire. Rien n'importait que la continuité fracassante des mille et mille instruments qui commandaient les hommes. (225–26)

For Bardamu, the mechanization of labor constitutes a process of dehumanization, as the worker becomes sucked up in its vertiginous, annihilating force. The industrial environment appears as an encroaching abyss threatening to destroy the individual's very sense of self.

While *Voyage* presents a grim picture of urban life, the narrator makes it clear that this modern condition is lived especially by the working classes, as typified by the Rancy community. When he first moves to Rancy, Bardamu perceives an *ouvrier* from his apartment window, wounded from his labor, and too poor to buy himself a drink:

> Moi je m'étais trouvé pour la pratique un petit appartement au bord de la zone d'où j'apercevais bien les glacis et l'ouvrier toujours qui est dessus, à regarder rien, avec son bras dans un gros coton blanc, blessé du travail, qui sait plus quoi faire et quoi penser et qui n'a pas assez pour aller boire et se remplir la conscience. (240)

A clear economic division separates the rich districts from the "zone," whose inhabitants are condemned to a life of unrelenting poverty and disease (287):

> Comme maladies c'était plutôt des gens de la zone que j'avais, de cette espèce de village qui n'arrive jamais à se dégager tout

> à fait de la boue, coincé dans les ordures et bordé de sentiers où les petites filles trop éveillées et morveuses, le long des palissades, fuient l'école pour attraper d'un satyre à l'autre vingt sous, des frites et la blennorragie. (333)

In *Voyage*, socio-economic inequality represents an essential component of urban living, and is directly related to the physical suffering of Paris's lower-class communities.

It is not a coincidence that crime is prevalent in Rancy. If Bardamu's patients commit acts of evil, it is because of the dire conditions in which they live. The doctor observes that "les riches n'ont pas besoin de tuer eux-mêmes pour bouffer. […] Ils ne font pas le mal eux-mêmes, les riches. Ils payent" (332). The poor, however, often resort to crime as a way of coping with their miserable condition. In *Voyage*, physical pain (*le mal*) and moral evil (*le Mal*) are directly related to one another. Bardamu diagnoses his clients' *mal physique* as a sign of their status as victims of an extra- and indeed anti-bodily condition, which he identifies as the ultimate cause of their criminal behavior. To be sure, Céline's casting of the body in the role of evil's first victim constitutes a radical break with Realist and naturalist writers who attributed criminal behavior to dangerous bodily drives.

Robinson's case is a good illustration of the causal relationship that Céline establishes between physical suffering and criminality. Robinson is a sick *ouvrier* who visits Bardamu in search of treatment for pain in his stomach and lungs, caused by poor working conditions: "Les acides lui brûlaient l'estomac et les poumons, l'étouffaient et le faisaient cracher tout noir […]. Je pouvais pas le guérir, tant qu'il travaillerait dans les acides… J'essayais de le remonter quand même" (294–95). While Bardamu explains that for his patient to be cured he must quit his job, Robinson's penury makes it impossible for him to follow his doctor's advice. According to Bardamu, Robinson's miserable situation has also made him depressed: "T'es déprimé" (295). Bardamu plays the role not only of doctor but also of psychologist in diagnosing Robinson's mental condition as a common state of depression among the marginalized: "Les hommes y tiennent à leurs souvenirs, à tous leurs malheurs et on ne peut pas les en faire sortir. Ça leur occupe l'âme. Ils se vengent de l'injustice de leur présent en besognant l'avenir au fond d'eux-mêmes avec de la merde" (295). In a subsequent con-

versation, Robinson explains to Bardamu that Mme Henrouille has offered him a large sum of money to murder her burdensome mother-in-law. He admits that his miserable living conditions have made it too tempting to refuse the deal: "À travailler comme je travaille, dans les conditions où je suis, à pas dormir, à tousser, à faire des boulots comme un cheval en voudrait pas… Rien peut m'arriver à présent de pire…" (308).

The case of Robinson, who resorts to murder in the hopes of freeing himself from social oppression, is a good illustration of the confluence of victim and perpetrator in *Voyage*. This double identity is made manifest in his conversation with Bardamu. While describing the details of his plan to murder La Vieille Henrouille, Robinson is frequently forced to interrupt himself, as he is overcome by a violent cough:

> [Robinson] se recroquevillait tellement dans le noir pour tousser sur lui-même que je ne le voyais presque plus, si près de moi, ses mains seulement je voyais encore un peu, qui se rejoignaient doucement comme une grosse fleur blême devant sa bouche, dans la nuit, à trembler. Il n'en finissait pas. […] Il se remit tout de suite à tousser par quintes. […] De tousser ainsi coup sur coup, ça l'énervait. (305–06)

Although Robinson plays two roles, his role as perpetrator remains secondary, and contingent upon his identity as victim. Instead of perceiving his interlocutor as immoral, Bardamu takes note of Robinson's fragile state, comparing him to a pale flower ("une grosse fleur blême"). After listening to his patient's rationalizations, Bardamu refrains from condemning his decision to murder, and even admits to the reader: "Je n'osais pas lui dire qu'il avait somme toute raison" (308). Moreover, after Robinson's attempt at murder fails, La Vieille Henrouille herself—the character most likely to perceive Robinson as an evildoer—proclaims him to be the victim of a modern conditioning of the individual: "On les a rendus comme ça, les hommes d'à présent! Parfaitement! On les habitue ainsi! qu'insistait la vieille. Il faut qu'ils tuent à ce jour pour manger!" (321). The subject "on" remains unidentified, precisely because La Vieille Henrouille has no specific group of people in mind when she speaks out against "those" who condition the individual to commit crimes. In *Voyage*, the true source of evil is to be found not among the urban dwellers but in the composite

image of modernity that the novel projects. Though perpetuated by the poor, human violence is most often provoked by an inescapable and oppressive modern condition. As Bardamu observes, "Si les gens sont si méchants, c'est peut-être seulement parce qu'ils souffrent" (74).

While Zola's novels, inspired by "pre-Pasteur" medicine, routinely examined characters' bodies as the primary source of evil, Céline follows more contemporary medical theory in painting a sympathetic portrait of the body as the victim of extra-bodily agents. Developing theory on the pathological microbe gives shape to a modern perspective on evil as a condition that oppresses the body from the exterior. Zola's and Céline's distinct diagnoses can be broadly linked to two different branches of biology—heredity (genetics) and microbiology. Whereas in Zola's *Le Docteur Pascal,* the title character, in an attempt to explain his ancestors' "immoral" behavior, constructs family trees to trace the transmission of "bad seeds," Céline's narrator treats patients who suffer from bacteria and other parasites, and links their illnesses and criminality to their unsanitary environment.

Throughout the nineteenth century, scientists and novelists relied heavily on biological explanations to account for human behavior. The notion of physical contagion, though considered a factor, remained secondary, and contingent upon established perceptions of specific groups of people as immoral by nature, that is, by race, sex, class, or body type. By serving as a metaphor for pseudo-scientific prejudices, contagion proved a vague concept prone to inspire a variety of interpretations, rather than a consistent scientific explanation.[18] In *Les Microbes: Guerre et paix*, Bruno Latour describes pre-Pasteur medicine as an unmethodical "style" rather than as a nosological approach:

> La rhétorique des hygiénistes […] n'[était] marquée par […] aucun argument central. Elle [était] faite d'une accumulation de conseils, de précautions, de recettes, d'avis, de statistiques, de remèdes, de règlements, d'anecdotes, d'études de cas. Justement c'[était] une *accumulation*. […] La raison de ce style […] est simple. La maladie, telle que la définiss[aient] les hygiénistes, peut être causée par *un peu tout*. Le typhus est peut-être dû à un contage, mais il peut être aussi dû au sol, à l'air, à l'encombrement. […] Trop de causes se mêl[aient] pour qu'on puisse prendre aucune position tranchée. Il fa[llait] tout considérer. (25; my emphasis)

In nineteenth-century medicine, germs were often understood as the result, not the origin, of disease (27–28). The idea that fatal illnesses were caused by foreign, invisible agents was not popular until after Pasteur's ground-breaking discoveries toward the end of the century: "Le pastorisme refond carrément le lien social pour y inclure l'action des microbes […] rend[a]nt l'ennemi visible" (41–45).

Indebted to Pasteur's discoveries, Bardamu constantly administers anti-microbial therapy to his patients: "J'épousais leur cause […] je leur donnais beaucoup d'iodure pour tâcher de leur faire cracher leurs sales bacilles" (335). To combat the bacteria-causing typhoid fever, Bardamu tries a number of vaccinal and other anti-microbial solutions (277). In *Mort à crédit*, the doctor-narrator explains that his daily routine consists of identifying the types of bacteria that cause his patients' suffering, and prescribing the proper anti-microbials: "Notre pratique ça consistait en *bâtons*, qu'on traçait sur un grand papier au fur et à mesure… Ça suffisait. Un *bâton* rouge: *Novars*… Vert: *Mercure!* […] Y avait plus qu'à piquer la sauce dans les fesses, dans les plis du bras […]. Refesses encore. *Bismuth!* […] Des *filaments* qui n'en finissent…" (30; emphasis added).

Bardamu's approach to medicine reflects Céline's career as a medical theorist and practitioner during the years in which he wrote *Voyage* (1928–32). Having graduated from medical school in 1924, he began working for the Bureau of Hygiene at the League of Nations. He also led an international group of doctors on visits to laboratories, hospitals, and factories throughout Europe and North America in order to report on contemporary hygiene practice and advances in the fight against tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and sexually transmitted diseases. And in 1928, Céline pursued his fight against disease as a public health physician at a dispensary in Clichy, a poverty-stricken suburb of Paris.[19] *Voyage*'s socio-medical analysis of disease faithfully reflects Céline's knowledge of etiology and professional concern for the health and working conditions of the poor, as evidenced in his medical notes of the time. On several occasions, Céline sharply criticized hygienists for ignoring the threat to public health that microorganisms posed, and called for a revolution in social hygiene by promoting the practice of sterilization and the transformation of working conditions. Céline also praised Pasteur's work as decisive in the

progress of medicine. In his medical thesis on Hungarian hygienist Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis's contributions to etiology, Céline underscored medicine's debt to Pasteur's discoveries concerning "la vérité microbienne."[20]

Why would Céline focus exclusively on non-genetic diseases in *Voyage*, as theories in both human heredity and microbiology were readily available in the 1920s? One possible answer is that the type of field work that Céline was engaged in inspired his literary interest in "the germ." Another compelling explanation, I believe, lies in the vision of evil that Céline was seeking to establish in *Voyage*, that is to say the type of relationship between poverty, sickness, and "immoral" behavior. Bardamu's frequent references to the *Ranciers* as hosts to harmful microorganisms effectively underpin their identity as victims of modernization. The very name "Rancy" suggests a rotting, or "rancid," community (rancidness being the olfactory sign of ravaging bacteria). The term *miteux* (derived from the word *mite*), which Bardamu frequently uses to refer to the lower classes, provides the image of the workers' parasite-infested bodies, thereby reinforcing their status as victims.[21] While a medical perspective that focuses on the detection of defective genes or the proliferation of cancerous cells would suggest that the *Ranciers*' illnesses originated from "within," and that their "proletarian" bodies are naturally prone to evil, Céline's preference for the image of microorganisms attacking the body from the outside provides an effective metaphor of an exterior, oppressive condition that unjustly targets the lower classes.

The two possible explanations for Céline's marked interest in the germ as chief metaphor are not mutually exclusive. Rather, it is likely that Céline's work as a hygienist and his modern vision of evil developed in relation to one another such that as a hygienist he felt that he was combating an evil condition, and that as a writer he was conveying what he understood as the bodily truth concerning human suffering. To the extent that *Voyage* takes interest in the lower classes and their environment, it can be said that Céline continues the work of nineteenth-century naturalists. But whereas in naturalist texts members of the lower class are often blamed for—or considered of the same "essence" as—their illness, environment, or criminal behavior, *Voyage* draws sharp distinctions between the body, the environment, and illness in its harsh critique of modernization.

Céline's narratives also differ from Zola's by lacking compensatory images that parry the negative affects of a godless universe. In *Voyage* no mechanisms of sublimation convert the figures of decomposition into images of regeneration. No project extracts redemptive qualities from the world's suffering. In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva identifies a lack of what she calls "Redemptive Unity" in Céline's fiction, "a single idea, guarantee and counterweight to overbearing abjection" (144–45). Indeed, Bardamu admits his own inability to perceive any forms of transcendence, to take hold of an idea that would assist him in coping with the harsh realities of life:

> Les miennes d'idées elles vadrouillaient plutôt dans ma tête avec plein d'espace entre, c'étaient comme des petites bougies pas fières et clignoteuses à trembler toute la vie au milieu d'un abominable univers bien horrible. […] Mais enfin c'était pas à envisager que je parvienne jamais moi, comme Robinson, à me remplir la tête avec une seule idée, mais alors une superbe pensée tout à fait plus forte que la mort. (501; qtd. in Kristeva 145)

Secondary characters prove equally impotent in sublimating life:

> [Baryton] ne pouvait plus rien sublimer, il voulait s'en aller seulement, emporter son corps ailleurs. Il n'était pas musicien pour un sou Baryton, il lui fallait donc tout renverser comme un ours, pour en finir. (416; qtd. in Kristeva 145)

The only potential counterweight to the novel's sustained nihilism appears in the form of a specific type of feminine body. On several occasions, Bardamu exhibits a fetishistic obsession with long, well-defined, nimble legs: "[d]es jambes longues et blondes et magnifiquement déliées et musclées, des jambes nobles" (228). Given Céline's expressed interest in the ballerina and the art of dance throughout his career as a writer, and clearly revealed in the introduction to *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (discussed in the following sections), it is not difficult to recognize the handful of references to specific attributes of the feminine physique as a fascination with dancers. It comes as no surprise that Céline dedicated *Voyage* to Elisabeth Craig: "une danseuse américaine qui m'a appris tout ce qu'il y avait dans le rythme, la musique et le mouvement."[22] One passage of the narrative in particular illustrates the strong attraction of the female dancer. While walking down the

streets of Broadway in New York City, Bardamu recounts a fleeting experience of "the supernatural," a moment of "surnaturelle révélation esthétique" when he encounters "une avalanche de femmes absolument belles" (193). Given Bardamu's immediate proximity to numerous theaters of Times Square, it is highly likely that this "avalanche of beautiful women" was in actuality a troupe of dancers. This would explain the narrator's admiration of the women's "gracieuses souplesses," his observation that they possess "toutes les promesses possibles de la figure et du corps," and their description as "trouvailles d'harmonie" (194). But despite these "supernatural" apparitions, Bardamu's state of hunger impedes him from escaping his material condition to celebrate Ideal beauty as the purity of form, rhythm, and movement: "Les beautés que je découvrais, incessantes, m'eussent avec un peu de confiance et de confort ravi à ma condition trivialement humaine. Il ne me manquait qu'un sandwich en somme pour me croire en plein miracle. Mais comme il me manquait le sandwich!" (193).

Faced with what he perceives to be a rare manifestation of the divine, Bardamu seeks self-sublimation in expressing the hope that one of the American beauties will call him to her, thereby rescuing him from his abject self. But alas, he waits in vain: "Elles pouvaient m'emmener, me *sublimer*, ces invraisemblables midinettes, elles n'avaient qu'un geste à faire, un mot à dire, et je passais, à l'instant même et tout entier dans le monde du Rêve, mais sans doute avaient-elles d'autres missions" (194; emphasis added). In *Voyage*, the narrator's attraction to the female dancer fails to open up to forms of transcendence or sublimation. Rather, the few glimmers of beauty that appear in the narrative are immediately snuffed out by a more somber rendition of the individual's inescapable condition of decrepitude. The rare images of feminine beauty only accentuate the depressed and melancholic state of a narrator whose heightened sense of life's absurdity and of impending death keeps the narrative grounded in a thoroughly physical description of the sufferings of the modern individual. In refusing sublimation, *Voyage*'s secularity forms an abyss that engulfs the self.

Evil and the Jew

Whereas in Céline's novels there is no Jewish Question, his subsequent pamphlets denounce a worldwide Jewish conspiracy responsible for the corruption of the modern era. While the Jew

remains absent from *Voyage*, the pamphleteer (identified as Louis-Ferdinand Céline) sees him everywhere—"Y a du Juif partout" (*Bagatelles* 284)—especially at the heads of the world's political, financial, and cultural centers:[23]

> Il n'existe en tout au monde qu'une seule vraie internationale, c'est la raciale tyrannie juive, bancaire, politique, absolue… Celle-là, est internationale! on peut le dire! sans interruption, sans une défaillance, totale, d'Hollywood, de Wall-Street la youtre, de Washington (Roosevelt n'est que l'instrument cabotin des grands Juifs […]) à Moscou, de Vancouver à Milan. (152)

> De toutes les Écoles [les Juifs] sont maîtres, tyrans, propriétaires absolus, de tous les Beaux-Arts du monde, surtout en France. Tous les professeurs, tous les jurys, les galeries, les expositions sont à présent pleinement youtres. (57)

Bagatelles pour un massacre abounds in long lists of Jewish names from Léon Blum to Charlie Chaplin, as Céline purports to denounce those who command and ravage (55). The analysis of social ills becomes a question of pointing fingers, as evil now has an identifiable perpetrator. By revealing the Jew as the malignant source, Céline abandons his modern vision of evil for an ancient and essentially Christian one. *Bagatelles* shares with Christian theology the belief in a single incarnation of evil. Céline's Jew simply takes the place of, or rather, becomes confused with, the Christian's Satan as the convenient scapegoat. Like the Jew, the devil is at once absent from Céline's novels and a central figure in the pamphlet ("Le diable est partout"; 213).

A lengthy harangue, *Bagatelles* also contains three ballets, the first of which manifestly transposes into dance the racist sentiment expressed throughout the pamphlet. In "La Naissance d'une fée," Satan appears as a primary character. In the third tableau, a stagecoach makes its way through a crowd of people when one of its axles breaks. The coachman descends, and is revealed to the reader as the devil in disguise: "Le cocher de la berline dégringole rapidement de son siège… C'est un petit homme tout brun, tout pétulant, visage bistré sous son grand tricorne, sourcils, moustaches à la Méphisto… (Attention! en réalité, c'est le Diable lui-même, travesti!)" (18). The coachman/devil introduces himself to the villagers as the King's *Maître des Ballets*, as twenty ballerinas follow his descent from the coach. While the vehicle is being repaired, the Master invites the crowd to observe the ballerinas in an impromptu

rehearsal. Much to their spouses' dismay, the male spectators are immediately bewitched, especially the *poète*, who forsakes his fiancée to vow to *la première danseuse* his unconditional love. Once the coach is repaired, the "diable-cocher-maître de ballet" departs with his ballerinas, as well as with the men of the town, who have managed to latch themselves onto the vehicle.

In the ballet's final *tableau*, which takes place at the *Château du diable*, the devil, "chez lui, habillé 'nature' en démon véritable," hosts a grand banquet. The village men are seated around a sumptuous table, above which an enormous, golden Lucifer literally preys on the hearts of men: "Lucifer, lui-même tout en or… mange seul, des âmes toutes crues… à sa table, avec un couvert tout en or… Les âmes ont la forme de cœurs… Il les déchire à pleines dents" (25). The first ballerina performs before the poet, who is unable to reach her, for he is chained to the table. Moreover, the sadistic devil commands the other villagers to dance not with their beloved ballerinas, but with each other.

Felicia McCarren explains that "La Naissance d'une fée" plots a sadistic, Semitic devil opposite a vulnerable Aryan poet in order to denounce the Jewish administrators of the contemporary arts who choke true artistic expression with harsh criticism and the hoarding of funds (176). This would corroborate what we have seen in passages of *Bagatelles* cited above, that identify the proprietors of modern culture as a group of tightfisted Jews. And indeed, Céline provides less than subtle clues that the *Maître des Ballets* is not only a devil in disguise, but also a Jew. The contrasts between Satan's dark features and the poet's blond hair, as well as the association that the text makes between Satan and gold, prefigure the recurring images of the dark-skinned, money-hoarding Jew that surface throughout the pamphlet: "Le sémite, nègre en réalité, n'est qu'une perpétuelle brute en tam-tam… Le Juif est le roi de l'or […]. Il possède tout" (49, 186). Likewise, the devil's role as sadistic predator constitutes the metaphor of the Jewish threat to Western civilization depicted throughout *Bagatelles*.

Whereas in the ballet, Satan is depicted with Jewish attributes, other passages of *Bagatelles* portray the Jew as diabolic. In an epigraph to one of the chapters, Céline quotes Jesus from St. John 8:44: "Si vous étiez des enfants spirituels d'Abraham vous feriez les œuvres d'Abraham… le père spirituel dont vous êtes issus c'est le diable" (265). Isolated from its context, Jesus's condemnation of

the wickedness of a particular Jewish sect (the Pharisees) appears as a revelation of the Jewish Nation as the devil's descendants. Similarly, in other passages Céline employs a condemnatory Christian rhetoric to denounce the Jew as the Aryan's devil:

> Le monde commandé par les Juifs, c'est un *enfer* pour les Aryens… sans abus, textuellement un *enfer!* avec les *flammes!* des crapauds partout! d'*éternelles tortures*… des révolutions, des guerres, des boucheries, à n'en plus finir […] les Juifs […] toujours en train d'en remettre, délirer, de comploter d'autres *calvaires* pour nos viandes… d'autres abracadabrants massacres […]. Ils *crucifient*. (324; emphasis added)

The anti-Semitism of *Bagatelles* resurrects a medieval tradition that confused the Jew and the devil, "the two inexorable enemies of Jesus, then, in Christian legend."[24] As Joshua Trachtenberg has shown in *The Devil and the Jews*, this tradition is typified by a number of medieval images that depict Satan with Semitic features and Jews with satanic features.[25] Trachtenberg avers that the word *medieval* "defines not [just] a chronological but a mental epoch," and applies the term to Nazi propaganda: "If the Nazi program has sometimes been loosely described as 'medieval,' in the matter of its Jewish policy it assuredly harks back to the psychology of the Middle Ages" (5). Likewise, *Bagatelles*'s portrayal of the diabolic Jew testifies to the survival of the medieval anti-Semitic mentality in modern times.

But more than simply a rehashing of medieval rhetoric concerning the Jew, *Bagatelles* also follows a nineteenth-century medical tradition that imagined relationships between physical traits and morality, and that often targeted the "Jewish" body.[26] It would appear that Céline enlisted this medical tradition to support his illustration of the "satanic Jew." In fact, as Sander Gilman emphasizes in *The Jew's Body*, one of the purposes of nineteenth-century medical theory was to explain "scientifically" the "Jewish difference" promulgated by medieval Christian legend and that continued to persist (39).[27] In order to support his claims of difference in Jewish behavior, Céline the pamphleteer, like the nineteenth-century theorist, proclaims a biological difference between the Jew and the rest of humanity:

> Les Juifs sont plutôt mal doués pour les arts, biologiquement, du fond même de leur nature. […] Leur système nerveux, ataviquement est de zinc et le demeure. (69)

> Le Juif, né rusé, n'est pas sensible […]. Dans sa viande même, pour l'émouvoir, il ne possède qu'un système nerveux de nègre des plus rudimentaires, c'est-à-dire un équilibre de rustre. (192)

In line with the nineteenth-century medical theorists that Gilman discusses, the pamphleteer claims that the "Semitic body" bears visual marks of the Jew's true nature: "Tu ne vois pas ta torture et ta mort inscrites, ravinées sur ces hures? […] Apprends à lire sur la figure des Juifs l'arrêt qui te concerne, personnellement, l'Arrêt, l'Annonce vivante, grimacière, de ton massacre" (297).

But while in the pamphlet the Jew's body indicates his thirst for blood and even portends his victim's murder, Céline also admits that the corporeal markers of the Semite's evil nature are difficult for the Aryan to detect: "Ils sont tous camouflés, travestis, caméléons, les Juifs" (127). The Jew, Céline argues, never willingly allows his "true" self to be seen by others (225–26). Céline thus proceeds to unmask the Jew's evil nature through a laborious bodily reading. He presents a lesson in physiognomy by identifying for the reader the expressions of the Jewish face that signal malicious intent:

> Il suffit de regarder, d'un petit peu près, telle belle gueule de youtre bien typique, homme ou femme, de caractère, pour être fixé à jamais… Ces yeux qui épient, toujours faux à en blêmir… ce sourire coincé… ces babines qui relèvent: la hyène… Et puis tout d'un coup ce regard qui se laisse aller, lourd, plombé, abruti… le sang du nègre qui passe… Ces commissures naso-labiales toujours inquiètes… flexueuses, ravinées, remontantes, défensives, creusées de haine et de dégoût… pour vous!… pour vous l'abject animal de la race ennemie, maudite, à détruire… Leur nez, leur "toucan" d'escroc, de traître, de félon, ce nez Stawisky, Barmat, Tafari… de toutes les combinaisons louches, de toutes les trahisons, qui pointe, s'abaisse, fonce sur la bouche, leur fente hideuse, cette banane pourrie, leur croissant, l'immonde grimace youtre, si canaille, si visqueuse, même chez les Prix de Beauté, l'ébauche de la trompe suceuse: le Vampire […]. De pareilles grimaces comme l'on en trouve sur la gueule des Juifs, sachez-le, ne s'improvisent pas, elles ne datent pas d'hier ou de l'Affaire Dreyfus… Elles surgissent du fond des âges, pour notre épouvante, des tiraillements du métissage. (296–97)

Céline's physiognomical reading presents a good example of nineteenth-century medical (and literary) thought that claimed a correlation between types of bodies and morality. He reveals the various traits of the Semitic body—dubious facial expressions, animal-like features, and dark blood—as the sure indicators of the Jew's dishonesty, aggression, and appetite for murder.

In its claim to reveal a truth inscribed on the human body, *Bagatelles* can be compared to novels by Balzac and Zola.[28] As E.P. Gauthier has pointed out, in nineteenth-century physiognomical thought, "human resemblances to various animals are highly significant indices to the recognition of character" (297).[29] Much like Zola's sinister characters, Céline's Jew is portrayed more as an animal than as a person. The pamphlet compares the Jewish body to certain types of animals in order to illustrate the "Semite's" evil nature. In what appears to be a lesson in zoology, Céline highlights the Jew's resemblance to the duck-billed platypus ("l'ornithorynx"):

> [Le Juif] me rappelait du Zoo de Londres, cet animal extravagant l'ornithorynx qu'est si habile, le faux castor incroyable, qu'a un bec énorme d'oiseau, qu'arrête pas aussi de plonger, de fouiner, de revenir […]. Il était habillé tout noir comme l'ornithorynx… et puis aussi l'énorme tarin, exactement aussi marrant… cornue comme l'ornithorynx… Il était souple à l'infini… extraordinaire à regarder, mais au bout des poignes par exemple, il avait aussi des griffes… et des venimeuses comme l'ornithorynx… (102)[30]

By highlighting the "resemblance" between the ornithorhunchus's nose and the "Semite's," Céline purports to unveil a series of hidden correspondences between the animal and the Jew. He paints the Jew's deceitfulness and evil intent by noting the platypus's "griffes venimeuses" and habit of foraging about with its nose. Clearly, Céline's passionate, irrational views engendered fantastical beliefs and perceptions of relationships.

The animal most useful to Céline in presenting the Jew as evil is the snake. The pamphleteer's use of this Judeo-Christian symbol of evil in a physiognomical study of the Jew illustrates the convergence of the religious and medical traditions that he is closely following. Concerning what he perceives as a Jewish assault on

civilization's art and artists, Céline states: "Le serpent juif, comme dans les oracles aurait enfin fait le tour de la terre et tout dilacéré, englué, perverti, charognisé sur son passage, à la sauce bien entendu démagogique, pacificatrice, édifianto-progressiste, affranchissante, franc-maçonne, soviétique et salutiste" (183). Céline then proceeds to compare the Jew to poisonous toads:

> [Le Juif] macère la moindre des littératures comme les plus grands empires, même "art et Taichnique," à la satanerie, aux venins, aux plagiats, aux incantations, aux escroqueries de mille sortes. Dix mille poisons divers pour toutes les œuvres de mort comme certains crapauds. Il n'a guère le Juif, d'autre talent, mais celui-là, il le possède jusqu'à la racine du prépuce. Le plus obtus, le plus glaireux, le plus gaffeur des Juifs possède quand même ultimement, ce sens d'alerte pour tout ce qu'il peut saisir, ce qui doit entrer dans ses cordes, culbuter dans sa tinette, à pourrir avec ses autres rapines, dans sa cuve aux maléfices. (183–84)

In the first example, the pamphleteer highlights the Jew's wickedness by likening the Jew to the snake's physical attributes and behavior. Specifically, he associates the serpent's rapacity and poisonous bite with the Jew's seizure and destruction of "authentic" art. In the second example, the Jew, like certain species of toad, infects and then feasts on its prey. It is noteworthy that in the first example, the snake becomes Jewish ("le serpent juif"), whereas in the second example the Jew acquires vicious animal attributes ("[Le Juif] macère […] aux venins, […son] sens d'alerte pour tout ce qu'il peut saisir"). It can be said that a characteristic of Céline's pamphlet writing—the dissolution of "metaphoricity," or rather the merger of metaphorical and literal speech—reflects the loss of perspective in irrational hatred. The comparisons that Céline makes clearly indicate that his lessons in "zoology" are above all the product of his racist imagination, and are meant to support his *parti pris*. These types of comparisons were typical of nineteenth-century discourse on the body and human behavior, both in literature and in medicine. Concerning Zola, Christopher Rivers states:

> Zola's treatise [*Le Roman expérimental*] parallels physiognomical thought in that, for both, the process is as follows: the gathering of roughly factual data in regard to which a fictional narrative is created which in turn supposedly reveals certain truths about the data and their meaning in the

> world. The most important link between the two methods lies in the fact that each is based on the creation of a more or less fictional narrative of explanation which is posited as scientific discourse. (181)

Like Zola's *Roman expérimental*, *Bagatelles*'s claim to physiological "truth" is actually the author's misuse of questionable data, as evidenced by spurious anatomical comparisons, in the creation of a human "type." All things considered, *Bagatelles*'s physiognomical readings sharply contrast with the Pasteurian perspective on the relationship between evil and disease that inspired *Voyage*.

To convey its racist message, *Bagatelles* employs a complex discourse on disease. But the pamphlet's references to microorganisms and contagion are not grounded in microbiology. Rather, *Bagatelles* follows nineteenth-century medical thought that attributed social ills to individual illness. As Robert Nye has shown in *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, French medicine of the late nineteenth century "viewed individual illness in the context of a 'total system' of pathology" (45). At a time when French society, obsessed with the notions of decadence, national decline, and debility, convinced itself that it was grievously ill, "a medical model [that] explicitly linked together the pathologies weakening the nation in a single degenerational syndrome […] was quickly gaining acceptance" (169). As the widespread anxiety concerning "domestic order and external security [became] infused with a medical perspective," there emerged "a language of national pathology" that regarded crime, mental illness, a lagging birth rate, the spread of tuberculosis and syphilis, and the rise of alcoholism as "signs of national debility" (135, 172–73).

Céline revitalizes this model of cultural crisis by venting his own anxiety about the sickness of the nation. He "pathologizes" the "Jewish" body by imagining the Jews as the infectious source of social, economic, and cultural decay. He attributes society's "rot" to "nos parasites juifs," and describes the "Jewish conspiracy" as a "termite problem" (60, 157). *Bagatelles* also speaks of the Jew himself as an infected being ("petit choléra raciste polluant"), and imagines the pervasiveness of gonorrhea and syphilis ("sa chaudepisse et sa vérole") among the Jews to describe their corrupting influence in the economy and the arts (223–28). By pathologizing the Jew, Céline follows a specifically anti-Semitic current in nineteenth-century medical theory that examined the "Semitic"

body as diseased, and as highly susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. Medicine especially linked syphilis, considered a Jewish disease, to the circumcised penis, which became the primary fetishistic symbol for the Jewish threat to the health of the social body.[31]

Céline's rhetoric of contagion betrays his own fear of the difference that he imagines in the Jew, which he shared with nineteenth-century theorists: "Je veux pas périr par les Juifs! Je préfère un cancer à moi!… pas le cancer juif!" (323). Echoing nineteenth-century medical thought, Céline reveals his fear of catching something that he initially posits as inherent to a specific body type. In using cancer to express contagion, Céline has plainly abandoned contemporary etiology to draw from a nineteenth-century understanding of human pathology, as outlined by Rivers, Nye, and Gilman. The actual microbes in *Voyage* are transformed in *Bagatelles* into metaphors for the Jews as foreign bodies menacing the health of society. The antagonistic relationship in the novel between the body and microorganisms is thus reversed and inverted in the pamphlet. The bacteria and parasites become metaphors of the malignant ("Semitic") body. Specific bodies emerge as the agents, rather than as the victims, of evil.

Death, Dance, the Jew, and Sublimation

To explain the series of radical shifts in Céline's thought from one perspective on evil to another, from one medical perspective to another, and from a secular to a religious mindset, is it useful to speak of "conversion"? Does the radical transformation in vision in Céline's opus originate from a genuine spiritual conversion? And if so, what may this say about the relationship between religious and secular thought in the early twentieth century?

To account for Céline's sudden turn to anti-Semitism, I shall first consider one more important difference between *Voyage* and *Bagatelles*—the narrators' identities. Contrary to Bardamu the physician, the pamphleteer presents himself as an embittered writer who unjustly suffers from harsh criticism, which he mulls over in the first pages: "Forcené, raidi, crispé qu'ils ont écrit tous […]. Monsieur Céline nous dégoûte, nous fatigue […]. Un sous-Zola sans essor […]. M. Céline est un plagiaire des graffiti d'édicules […]. Tordu au possible son style est un écœurement,

une perversion, une outrance" (14). As scholars have pointed out, the identities of Céline's narrators correspond either to the role of doctor or of writer that Céline himself "played" during different periods of his life. Philippe Roussin remarks that in the months following the publication of *Voyage*, Céline would present himself to interviewers as a Bardamu figure, a humble physician whose book was merely "the product of a part-time activity": "By displaying himself as a doctor-author, Céline insisted on *Voyage*'s being viewed as part and parcel of a *medical* rather than literary *identity*" (252–53). Conversely, scholars have matched the voice of the pamphlet not with Céline "the doctor" but with Céline "the writer." Godard stresses that *Bagatelles* is the first text in which the author's pen name appears, and is used by Céline to refer to his writer persona.[32] Indeed, the pamphleteer, who identifies himself as "Monsieur Céline," is above all preoccupied with affirming his talent by defending his literary style.

Decisions that Céline made immediately preceding the publication of *Bagatelles* suggest that during this time, he was fully devoted to his career as a writer while he performed his medical duties perfunctorily. Eleven days prior to the pamphlet's release in print, Céline quit his positions at the Clichy dispensary and at a biotherapy laboratory. Frédéric Vitoux speculates that these resignations were due to the fact that he anticipated being fired once his pamphlet was accessible to the public, as the municipality where he worked was leftist and some of his superiors were Jewish (309–10). This would strongly suggest that Céline considered the publication of *Bagatelles* more important than his medical career. What is most certain is that by the time the pamphlet first appeared in bookstores, Céline was no longer divided between his medical and literary vocations; he became a full-time writer, and identified himself as such.

As the introduction of *Bagatelles* indicates, the years just prior to the pamphlet's publication represented a time of heightened insecurity for Céline. Critics condemned *Mort à crédit* for its popular language and sordid content, and *Mea culpa* as a whimsical retraction of what readers had originally praised as the author's leftist stance. As scholars claim, Céline's impetus to write *Bagatelles* was a series of harangues directed against his very image as a writer.[33] In the pamphlet, Céline makes it clear that his anti-Semitic flare responds directly to the denigration of his work by critics whom

he recognizes as being of Jewish ethnicity (15, 29). Upon hearing from his interlocutor that impresarios have refused to stage various ballet scenarios that he had written shortly after completing *Mort à credit*, Mr. Céline declares his new vocation as an anti-Semitic writer: "Tu me fais rentrer ma jouissance… Tu m'arraches les couilles… Tu vas voir ce que c'est qu'un poème rentré! […] Ah! tu vas voir l'antisémitisme! Ah! tu vas voir si je tolère qu'on vienne me tâter pour de rien!" (41). In the pamphlet Céline argues that if reviews and newspapers are criticizing him, it is not because he is an incompetent writer, but because of a Jewish conspiracy. As Céline sees it, his reputation as an *homme de lettres* rests on the aggressive defamation of those who have unjustly denigrated it.[34] And it is to the rhetoric of nineteenth-century medical discourse on the body and disease that Céline turns in self-defense. While Bardamu's imagination is underpinned by his knowledge of microbiology, Mr. Céline betrays this knowledge to take a racist angle on the "corruption" of art in French society. No longer concerned with medical truth, Céline adopts an earlier medical tradition whose biological determinism, physiognomical thought, and slapdash diagnoses are more in line with anti-Semitism's way of "reasoning."

The beginning of *Bagatelles* dramatically announces Céline's abrupt turn toward anti-Semitism. Céline himself proclaims this "transformation": "Je suis *devenu* antisémite et pas un petit peu pour de rire, mais férocement jusqu'aux rognons!" (56; emphasis added). He also announces his new literary project of writing an anti-Semitic poem: "Tu vas voir ce que c'est qu'un poème rentré!… […] Ah! tu vas voir l'antisémitisme" (41). Moreover, Céline's interlocutor takes note of this radical change in Céline's thought and persona: "Tu es vénal… perfide, faux, puant, retors, vulgaire, sourd et médisant… *Maintenant* antisémite, c'est complet! C'est le comble!" (16; emphasis added).

But is it possible to consider both Céline's embrace of anti-Semitism, and his emerging image as a writer in desperate need of protecting his honor, as the tragic consequences of another, *failed* conversion? A closer look at the introductory pages of *Bagatelles*, which provide a framing for the author's newly espoused ideology, suggest just this. The pamphlet's initial passage is not about Céline's hatred of Jews. Rather, Céline begins by professing to his Jewish friend Léo Gutman his ever-growing passion for dancers: "Je m'ouvrais tout récemment à un petit pote à moi, un bon petit médecin dans mon genre, en mieux, Léo Gutman, de ce goût de

plus en plus vivace, prononcé, virulent, que dis-je, absolument despotique qui me venait pour les danseuses… […] Je lui avouai toute ma passion ravageuse" (12). In fact, before any talk of composing an "anti-Semitic poem," Céline divulges his desire to transcribe the poetry of dance:

> Dans une jambe de danseuse le monde, ses ondes, tous ses rythmes, ses folies, ses vœux sont inscrits!… Jamais écrits!… Le plus nuancé poème du monde!… émouvant! Gutman! Tout! Le poème inouï, chaud et fragile comme une jambe de danseuse en mouvant équilibre est en ligne, Gutman mon ami, aux écoutes du plus grand secret, c'est Dieu! C'est Dieu lui-même! Tout simplement! Voilà le fond de ma pensée! A partir de la semaine prochaine Gutman, après le terme… je ne veux plus travailler que pour les danseuses… Tout pour la danse! (12)

In this passionate disclosure, Céline announces a radical shift in his literary aspirations from novels of darkness and death to a poetry of dance that celebrates the beauty of form, movement, and rhythm. It is especially noteworthy that Céline equates dance with God ("c'est Dieu!"), whose mention also constitutes a radical break with the early novels. While Céline is not necessarily suggesting that he believes in God's existence in the traditional sense, he nonetheless expresses his yearning to "convert" to a poetic esthetics of the Ideal, in which the "divine" as a fluid signifier constitutes the fount of inspiration. A discussion of such a transformation of literary vision in terms of "conversion" seems especially justified by Céline and Gutman's description of the writer's attraction to dancers in terms of spiritual abandonment, godly devotion, sublime death, and rebirth:

> Elles m'appellent!… Je ne suis plus moi-même… Je me rends… […] Périr par la danseuse… […] Je veux m'écrouler, m'effondrer, me dissiper, me vaporiser, tendre nuage… en arabesques… dans le néant… dans les fontaines du mirage… je veux périr par la plus belle… Je veux qu'elle souffle sur mon cœur… Il s'arrêtera de battre… (12)
>
> Tu veux lutiner les étoiles? (13)
>
> Ah! Je me récrirai […] Je voudrais seulement observer en très grand secret ces mignonnes "à la barre"… dans leurs exercices… comme on admire à l'église les objets du culte… de très loin… Tout le monde ne communie pas!… (13)
>
> Je vois le ciel! La danse c'est le paradis! (16)

These passages recount in succession Céline's admiration for dance and the ballerina, psychic abandonment, willingness to plunge into the void and die in a "dancing" rapture, and rebirth as a poet of the Ideal. Through dance, Céline intended to "rewrite himself" ("Je me récrirai") as a mirror image of *Voyage*'s abject narrator. In turning from material realism to poetic idealism Céline envisioned a literary trajectory quite contrary to that of Baudelaire's poetry (as delineated in Chapter 2).

What is strikingly manifest in these passages, precisely because it is missing from Céline's early fiction, is the sublimation of death itself. Whereas in *Voyage* and *Mort à crédit* the narrator stares death in the face by accepting its harsh reality, here Céline's writing sublimates death by transforming it into a frenetic dance. No longer taken at face value, death becomes beautiful for it is charged with pure movement and described in terms of ecstasy. In sketching his own death as an arabesque surrender to a divine figure, the writer's fervent submission resembles death's sublimation in the biographies of Christian martyrs and saints. The desire to envision the Ideal, to rewrite the world by infusing it with beauty, constitutes the recurring refrain of the pamphlet's introduction: "Pour aller au déduit divin, je ferai de cette terre, de ce cadavre au fond des nuages, une étoile de première grandeur! Je ne recule devant aucun miracle…" (16). Kristeva has argued that in Céline's later (post-war) fiction, death is sublimated through rhythm and music: "Céline's journey, to the end of the night, will also encounter rhythm and music as being the only way out, the ultimate sublimation of the unsignifiable" (23). But as we can see here, the attempt to sublimate death first occured much earlier, at the beginning of *Bagatelles*, and is featured as the immediate precursor to anti-Semitism.

Biographers and literary scholars have convincingly argued that Céline's turn to dance was his way of coping with an unnerving obsession with death, which was only exacerbated by disparaging literary reviews and current events threatening world war. As Godard explains, "[Céline] a besoin [de la danse] comme d'un contrepoids aux aspects négatifs de cette vie dont son imaginaire fait la matière des romans qu'il écrit"(*Un autre Céline* 83). Vitoux aptly suggests that this short but significant stage in Céline's career as a writer of ballets evidenced a desperate attempt to find happiness, or at least to enjoy a short reprieve from death's stench.[35] But

when Céline's multiple attempts at the staging of his ballets failed, he chose yet a new path. He continued to aspire to become a poet, no longer of dance but of anti-Semitism. Once the Russians, the French, the English, and the Americans refused to stage his ballets, he perceived the door to the Ideal close behind him, which triggered the anguishing feeling of castration: "Tu me fais rentrer ma jouissance… Tu m'arraches les couilles…" (*Bagatelles* 34). This visceral reaction to the rejection of his ballets suggests that the decision to write about something other than death, to devote himself to the beautiful, seemed to constitute a primeval, psychic drive. In this light, Céline's subsequent turn to anti-Semitism is not an incomprehensible leap.

Kristeva describes anti-Semitism as a sublimation that aids the psyche in coping with the individual's "materiality," or the reality of death. By embracing anti-Semitism, the ego experiences "abjection" in a way that allows it to regain its identity as safely separate(d) from the dark, encroaching world that threatens to consume it. By believing in the evil Jew, the self seeks a way out, an alternative path to transcendence (180, 185). By becoming an object, the Jew "gives thought a focus, where all contradictions are explained and satisfied" (178). Anti-Semitism is a "yearning after Meaning" that, in casting the Jew as the negative pole, re-presents in "meaningful" terms an otherwise absurd and hostile world (136). By "providing itself with objects," the self regains a compass for what it had experienced as a nauseating journey through life—or death, rather (136). Kristeva describes Céline's anti-Semitism as a "security blanket" that protects him from the world of his own visions: "Céline's anti-Semitism, like political commitment, for others—like, as a matter of fact, any political commitment, to the extent that it settles the subject within a socially justified illusion—is a security blanket. […] A *delirium* that literally prevents one from going mad, for it postpones the senseless abyss" (136–37). Whereas Bardamu "drowns in the whirl of its objects and its language," for the pamphleteer the abject Jew thwarts "the disintegration of identity" (136).

The embrace of anti-Semitism as a way of rescuing oneself from the abject world and of forging an altogether new identity constitutes the symptom of a larger existential crisis that Céline endured, and that cannot be separated from the narrator's psychological state of depression in *Voyage*. A comparison of the novel and the

pamphlet underscores the precarious nature of a type of modern secular writing (in *Voyage*) that resists sublimation. It is precisely Céline's non-compensatory secularity that eventually yielded to a radical vision that we could describe as para- or quasi-religious. Anti-Semitism's violent eruption occurred precisely because the psychic need for sublimation was not satisfied through dance. It is highly probable (even if speculative) that Céline's rage would have never come to be, or would have been delayed, had his ballet scores met with success. (Of course, by stating this, in no way do I excuse the writer's anti-Semitism.) As strongly suggested in the pamphlet's initial pages, Céline's turn to anti-Semitism proves to be a dreadful consequence of his unsuccessful conversion to the Ideal—of his abortion, so to speak, rather than of his rebirth as a poet of the sublime. And yet, for the purpose of this study the question remains, to what extent does Céline's turn to anti-Semitism approximate Huysmans's conversion to Catholicism?

Coping with Evil and Conversion

William James's notion of the sick soul, as well as his understanding of conversion, will allow us to draw important conclusions on the relationship between religion, secular thought, and evil. In Lectures IV–VII of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James makes an important distinction between two general types of psychological disposition: the healthy-minded soul and the sick soul. Healthy-minded individuals appear effortlessly to embrace a sustained sense of "the goodness of life," even in spite of whatever tragedies might befall them, and regardless of the religion into which they were born. Their abiding optimism stems from an underlying belief that they share in the inherent goodness of nature (72–73). But the term *healthy-mindedness* is misleading, as James himself recognizes, for he proceeds to explain that for a mind to be "healthy," it must paradoxically "suffer" from a "congenital anæsthesia." That is to say, the healthy-minded are incapable of "feeling evil," of taking cognizance of the reality of human suffering. Accordingly, James even suggests that the healthy-minded are "quasi-pathological":

> One can but recognize in such writers as these the presence of a temperament organically weighted on the side of cheer and fatally forbidden to linger […] over the darker aspects of the universe. In some individuals, optimism may become

> quasi-pathological. The capacity for even a transient sadness or a momentary humility seems cut off from them as by a kind of congenital anæsthesia. (*Varieties* 75)

For James, Walt Whitman is "the supreme contemporary example of such an inability to feel evil," for his writing conceived "good as the essential and universal aspect of being, [and] deliberately exclude[d] evil from its field of vision" (*Varieties* 77–79). Described in these terms, Whitman would appear to be the antithesis of Baudelaire, who perceived evil to be life's very substance. James goes on to describe this congenital anaesthesia as a psychic "self-protection by ignoring." Happiness is in fact contingent upon "shutting one's eyes" to evil, upon "hushing it up" (79).

Whereas the healthy-minded soul minimizes evil, the sick soul maximizes it. It is persuaded that "the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world's meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart" (James, *Varieties* 112). Readers of *Voyage* may immediately recognize Bardamu as a clear example of James's "sick soul" for he "cannot swiftly throw off the burden of the consciousness of evil, but [is] congenitally fated to suffer from its presence" (James, *Varieties* 114). James identifies in the "sick soul" the propensity for "second birth," in which the self eventually reaches a psychic "threshold" after which it embraces a new vision of things in order to continue functioning. In fact, as James explains, while the healthy-minded need only be born once to achieve happiness, sick souls must pass through a second birth (*Varieties* 139). The mindset of the twice-born is a religion that looks beyond natural good for the truth of things: they envision a hidden, spiritual "truth" that explains evil's existence and reveals the meaning of life:

> In the religion of the twice-born, on the other hand, the world is a double-storied mystery. Peace cannot be reached by the simple addition of pluses and elimination of minuses from life. Natural good is not simply insufficient in amount and transient, there lurks a falsity in its very being. Cancelled as it all is by death if not by earlier enemies, it gives no final balance, and can never be the thing intended for our lasting worship. It keeps us from our real good, rather; and renunciation and despair of it are our first step in the direction of the truth. There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other. (James, *Varieties* 139)

James describes the sick soul as a divided self or a heterogeneous personality characterized by the discordance created by opposing impulses. This division may be the result of the psychic suppression of life-affirming impulses in the face of what the self perceives as an absurd world. The *Voyage* narrative evidences the suppression of such impulses in that only on extremely rare occasion does Bardamu feel moved to meditate on something (the beauty of woman, the movement of a ballerina's legs) considered worthwhile. And yet, these moments of meditation are quickly curtailed by the shadow of death. As Céline scholars have noted time and again, anti-Semitic sentiment just as rarely and quite obliquely emerges in *Voyage* and *Mort à crédit*, and suggests a second opposing force poised to resist Bardamu's "death instinct." Conversion, for James, is the reconciliation of the psyche's divided halves, in which "the higher and lower feelings, the useful and erring impulses […] end by forming a stable system of functions in right subordination" (*Varieties* 142). Conversion, James stresses, need not always be one to belief specifically in a supernatural being:

> The new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event—a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency. (*Varieties* 146–47)

James goes on to suggest that the larger the subliminal region that hosts these opposing and suppressed forces, the more radical, violent, or abrupt the conversion when it does occur (193).

James utilizes the term *threshold* as a symbolic designation for the point of conversion. Because everyone has a threshold for pain, and because of the sick soul's hypersensitivity to evil, it is more likely that its threshold for pain will be reached than that of the healthy-minded soul. This self is a bell with many cracks through which seep an overpowering nausea and the affect of melancholy (*Varieties* 116). At this point of liminality, the ego can no longer tolerate its fatigue, lethargy, torpor, powerlessness of will, and meaninglessness. Some event—like a bugle call—causes it to

explode. In his elaboration of James's concept of the threshold in *New Pathways in Psychology*, Colin Wilson explains: "No one likes to live on this level of boredom and non-feeling. We all instinctively turn towards *meaning*, towards situations that stimulate us, as a flower turns to the sun" (87). Accordingly, it seems helpful to understand Céline's turn to dance, and subsequently to anti-Semitism, as two ways of coping with hypersensitivity toward evil, with an abiding awareness of life's absurdity, and the pervasive stench of death. If Céline had not yet reached this psychic threshold with his own literary vision, the harsh criticism of his novels, the rejections of his ballets, and the mounting threat of world war made up the composite event that, like a series of bugle calls, pushed the writer to conversion.

Although James describes both religious and non-religious conversions as the same "psychic form of event," he has observed that seemingly without exception religious conversions are accompanied by a "joyous conviction." For James, the central characteristic of religious conversions is "the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, *the willingness to be*" (*Varieties* 201; emphasis in original). A second characteristic of religious conversions is the convert's perception of "clean and beautiful newness within [the self] and without" (202). Although Céline's embrace of anti-Semitism, following James's description, appears as a type of conversion, because his embrace of anti-Semitism lacks joyous conviction and the feeling of self cleanliness it is not unreservedly "religious." Céline's conversion to anti-Semitism constitutes a case of conversion in that the self replaces one vision of the world in the attempt to reconcile opposing subliminal forces with a worldview concerned with a hidden order or truth (a Jewish conspiracy, the supremacy of certain races, forms of arts, and cultures) that is greater than the reality of "appearances" shared by humanity as a whole. But I would qualify that this conversion is partial because the pamphleteer's anti-Semitism is founded on his own inability to truly "convert" to a poetic Ideal. And second, his conversion is not wholly religious, following James's definition, because the psyche continues to suffer from great fear, even paranoia. Céline's dread of catching the Jewish "disease," expressed numerous times throughout the pamphlet, underscores precisely this. His conversion should, however, be qualified as para-religious or quasi-religious because of its

"revelatory" nature—the pamphleteer poses as a prophet—its recourse to religious imagery and discourse on (medieval) Christian legend, and its belief in a hidden realm of "correspondences."[36]

The transformations in Céline's literary imagination from one medical tradition to another, and from one philosophy of evil to another, tells the story of the passage from a modern and thoroughly secular vision of social ills to an outmoded medical and quasi-religious perception of evil. To be sure, it is the story of a radical, yet unstable secularity that falls on its head. Céline's early fiction is utterly secular precisely because it lacks any significant sublimation. That is to say, it attempts to approach being unreservedly, to lay bare humanity's sheer materiality and the terrifying face of death (which modernity—total war, urbanization, industrialization—gravely accentuated) without seeking out sources of redemption. I have suggested, in building from Kristeva's analysis of Céline, that it is the very lack of sublimation in Céline's early fiction that makes it vulnerable to implosion. As we have seen, the novelist desperately turned to dance, then to anti-Semitism, as two ways of sublimating, and therefore of rejecting the dismal universe of *Voyage* that haunted the writer. At the heart of secular thought lies a disturbing irony, which we can sense in both Huysmans and Céline. It is the most secular of writers—those who paint a godless, evil world, those "sick souls" who cannot ignore the unjust sufferings of the young and innocent—who are all the more susceptible to religious or quasi-religious conversion. James's description of the self's hypersensitivity to the existence of evil, and its proclivity to "rebirth" or conversion—seems in fact to confirm this. These observations do not seem to bode well for secularization as a sustaining trend in modern social thought, for they suggest that the most unconditionally secular frames of mind are prone to transform into formidable forms of religiosity.

Conclusion

An underlying dilemma rests at the core of the modern narrative. On the one hand, secularizing visions arise from the shared perception among writers that God's existence is incompatible with the reality of evil. On the other hand, the divine resurfaces as the result of an often unconscious intolerance for a godless world of disorder, injustice, suffering, and death. Accordingly, evil proves to be the source both of unbelief and of an unexpected return of the religious. In between belief and unbelief lies the psychology of secularization in constant negotiation. The psychological drama behind Baudelaire's philosophical positioning against theodicy prolongs the very memory of God. Within a poetics of mourning, the divine resists total eclipse in remaining obstinately poised at the liminal point of eclipse, the horizon of the self's field of vision. For Zola, God constitutes the unconscious subtext of a literary project to redefine evil solely in physiological terms. In *Thérèse Raquin*, even as immorality is reduced to bodily drives, theological notions of a hidden moral order, the certainty of just retribution, and omniscient avatars of God infuse the narrative with metaphysical presence. And in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, the chaotic forces of the physical world, in threatening the mind's sense of coherence, trigger compensatory mechanisms of sublimation through the appropriation of religious beliefs, images, and symbols. As an example of Kant's sublime experience, the Zolian narrative enlists the "reason" of spiritual traditions to resist "sensible annihilation." Huysmans's bold confrontation with the perceived meaninglessness of existence sparks, seemingly ironically, an actual religious conversion. Repression of childhood faith in the attempt to paint the brute nature of existence reaches a psychic threshold beyond which an embrace of God means the affirmation of a spiritual realm. In *En route,* conversion presents a case of

Freudian sublimation as the reinvestment of unruly sexual drives; the protagonist's submission to God effectively converts the negative pleasure associated with masculine desire and the female other into positive energies of rapture and jubilation. Finally, Céline's turn from a dark, abject world to the Ideal by way of anti-Semitism constitutes a quasi-religious conversion that confers a hidden order to things as a means to countering the anxieties of our unredemptive human condition. Each writer's attraction to the religious seems psychologically intelligible if, in fact, narcissism is an inherited evolutionary trait that aids in self-preservation. To the extent that we reflexively retreat from the annihilating threats of a godless world, narcissism prevails over secularity. Religion, as the ultimate sublimation, reconstitutes the ego's integrity in reaction to the existential challenges of the secular.

The self's struggle with psychic dissolution varies considerably from writer to writer. In Baudelaire's case, the "death" of God is experienced as the loss of self-image as a Romantic and Catholic poet. While in the prose poems narcissism gives birth to the elegiac ego, irony intervenes to alleviate the painful feeling of self-incoherence. Through the unremitting process of grieving, irony as self-distanciation from mystical Romanticism emerges as the privileged mode of sustaining secularization. Zola's self-identification as naturalist, as well as Huysmans's as fervent Catholic, rely on the strength of their ideological convictions. As the cross-pressures of rivaling worldviews posed inexorable challenges to each other, both writers become uncannily attracted to the other side. For Zola, forms of narrative irony serve to contain an otherwise genuine, but unsettling, interest in the mystical. Whereas in *Les Rougon-Macquart* the return of the religious mitigates the negative affects associated with the apprehension of a godless universe, the stakes are different in *Lourdes*. Self-preservation actually entails the reaffirmation of God's nonexistence, since the writer's avowed atheism and naturalist ideology, placed into question by the Lourdes phenomenon, is inseparable from his self-image. Both Zola in *Lourdes* and Huysmans in *Les Foules de Lourdes* enlist an established position for or against theodicy to give a (self-)convincing explanation of innocent suffering, to parry the disarming affects of identity dissolution and unbelief, and to re-anchor themselves firmly in their official ideology. Highly reactionary, the two texts on the shrine are equally written on "faith," propelled by

the urgency to repel the enemy's appeal, and ultimately, by self-doubt. In the case of Céline, critics' harsh rejections played a crucial role in undermining his self-image as a writer both of novels and of ballets. Described in terms of emasculation, and imagined as castration, Céline's "failures" as a writer seemed only to hasten his self-transformation from a novelist of "dark matter" into a "visionary prophet" who denounces social ills, uncovers a worldwide conspiracy, and warns of impending apocalypse. Céline's literary trajectory demonstrates that in anti-Semitism, scapegoating is ultimately about self-sublimation.

The paradox of a secular tradition that struggles to tolerate its own worldview may in fact trace the boundaries of literature itself. Can secular consciousness sustain a direct confrontation with evil? In proffering two psychological dispositions—a "healthy mind" that thrives but only by ignoring evil, and a "sick soul" that can only bear the apprehension of evil up to a certain threshold—James suggests that a non-compensatory account of the human condition would prove highly fragile, if not psychologically inviable. It would seem that the hybridity of a Baudelairean or a Zolian narrative, in which divine specters inescapably haunt the development of secular vision, allow the self to catch only glimpses of a resolutely godless universe. Conversion in Huysmans and Céline marks the passage through a psychic threshold in which the self, no longer able to withstand the pain of secularity, embraces a new, (quasi-)religious worldview. But in the end, conversion in Huysmans's mystical novels and Céline's pamphlets, as well as sublimation in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, serve the same function of "sublimating" disturbing affects, of "converting" chaos into order. Observations made in this book of the enduring place of religious thought and sentiment in literary secularity, as well as the various rapprochements made between religious and secular works, are meant to encourage ongoing dialogue on the relationships between presumably two distinct modes of thought.

In the wake of the Holocaust, an emerging "post-structuralist" and "post-modern" way of thinking largely shifted the focus of discussion on God and evil. Through the rejection of master narratives that identify a single source of all human tragedy (such as capitalism or the body), the world appears not so much dark and willfully hostile as opaque. Such is the impression given, for example, in Hannah Arendt's depiction (in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*)

of Adolf Eichmann not as a scheming, demonic executioner with a hatred for Jews, but rather as an apathetic personality and simple cog in the wheel of a much larger, self-propelling system of obscure social and economic forces. By calling into question the concept of the self-sufficient *cogito*, post-modernists since Arendt have encouraged us, perhaps inadvertently, to relinquish the desire to discern causal relationships that would give meaning to the world and aid in combatting injustice. In light of Lacan's notion of the decentered subject that questions the self's ability to comprehend the complex, manifold relationships between forces that influence human interaction, discussion of absolute terms such as "Evil" and "God" have appeared to many intellectuals as naïve at best. As Berel Lang has noted, "if post-modernity expected to leave anything behind, [it would be precisely] the nostalgia for the binary or dualistic thinking [that] opposes virtue to vice and then asserts that we can tell […] the difference between them" (11). And yet, perhaps the post-modern turn away from confronting evil, under the guise of the demise of the thinking subject, may in fact assist the self in coping with the realities of injustice and human suffering largely through ignoring. Later, Arendt herself seemed to target the potential dangers of the post-modern condition when, in the *The Life of the Mind*, she resurrected the thinking subject. Thinking, she opined, may constitute our only weapon against evil.[1] Notwithstanding trends in post-modernism, as long as human suffering is among us, evil will remain a compelling source of inquiry. And as long as the human race seeks answers for our existence, God's existence will be debated. Although this study has featured the psychology of secularization as having taken shape at a unique moment in history in which positivism and Catholicism equally dominated France's social imaginary, questions of evil and God have formed an enduring, dynamic intersection between the religious and the secular that may, in fact, prove to be the greatest legacy of modern consciousness.

Notes

Introduction

1. For an overview of scholars' association of modernity with secularity, see Vincent P. Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*, notably the introduction, chapter 3, and chapter 5. See also the introduction to *Sacred and Secular Agency in Early Modern France*, in which Sanja Perovic notes that almost all scholars understand secularization as "fundamental to the notion of modernity" (1). In *Secularization and Its Discontents*, Rob Warner provides a summary of scholarly discourse on secularization, beginning with Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, who posited "a causal interaction between the processes of modernization and the decline of religion" (26). In *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, Steve Bruce attributes the waning of the power, popularity, and prestige of religious beliefs, behavior, and institutions to modernization *tout court* (24).

2. See for instance Robert Coles's *The Secular Mind* and Paul Kurtz's *What Is Secular Humanism?*

3. See Taylor on the "enchanted" and "disenchanted" construals, 25–89.

4. In his summary of the distinctions made by Giambattista Vico between "sacred" and "worldly" history, Vincent Pecora similarly describes the modern nation-state as founded precisely on the "foreclosure of the sacred" and the concomitant rise of the individuated human will that, unfettered by allegiance to sacred or even pseudo-sacred beliefs, "becomes the only measure of authentic human existence" (4).

5. See the introduction to Vincent P. Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism* for a summary of revisionist theory on linear models of secularization (1–24).

6. See Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as well as Walter Benjamin's "Capitalism as Religion," in which the authors discuss the development and effects of capitalism during the Protestant Reformation. ("Capitalism as Religion" is a translation of Fragment 74, entitled "Kapitalismus als Religion" from vol. 6 of Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften* 100–03.)

7. Chadwick states: "You can no longer explain the movement of minds by seizing only upon what was expressed in formal propositions, articulately. […] That is why the problem of secularization is not the same as the problem of the enlightenment. Enlightenment was of the few. Secularization is of the many" (9).

8. See Berger's *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* 7.

9. See Walter Benjamin's portrait of the poet in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* as a modern writer embodying the many paradoxes of modern life.

10. I follow Edward Kaplan's general assessment in *Baudelaire's Prose Poems* of *Le Spleen de Paris* as constituting a shift in Baudelaire from idealism to realism.

Chapter One: Writing against Theodicy: Secularization in Baudelaire's Poetry and Critical Essays

1. A half-dozen or so books published in the 1960s studied the broad theme of evil in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Scholars including Max Milner (*Le Diable dans la littérature française de Cazotte à Baudelaire*) and Pierre Emmanuel (*Baudelaire*), continuing in the tradition established by Georges Blin (*Le Sadisme de Baudelaire*), Jean Prévost (*Baudelaire: Essai sur l'inspiration et la création poétiques*), and Marcel Ruff (*L'Ésprit du Mal et l'esthétique baudelairienne*), outlined a "Baudelairean" esthetics of evil through close readings of his lyric poetry, correspondence, and biographical data. Unfortunately, these studies largely neglect Baudelaire's later writings, including *Le Spleen de Paris*. Through an analysis of later essays and prose poems in addition to his lyric poetry, this essay aims to uncover a sustained reflection on theodicy throughout Baudelaire's writings.

2. E. Kaplan has thoroughly described this shift in Baudelaire from an idealist or metaphysical poetics to a "realist" poetics of "daily experience" in his study on Baudelaire's prose poems.

3. In *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*, Fondane describes Baudelaire's interest in evil (and pain) as a genuine need to feel himself exist: "Un besoin se fait jour de se sentir *exister*, de rompre avec la *monotonie* de l'être. […] Et qu'est-ce qui *révèle* l'existence, sinon ce sentiment de douleur?" (331; Fondane's emphasis).

4. It should also be noted that "Le Voyage," the poem that closes the 1861 version of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, provides a harsh critique of religion in general. In this poem, a group of sailors paint a pathetic portrayal of the world's religions. They describe through comparison the individual's pursuit of holiness as deplorable: "Plusieurs religions semblables à la nôtre, / Toutes escaladant le ciel; la Sainteté, / Comme en un lit de plume un délicat se vautre, / Dans les clous et le crin cherchant la volupté…" (*OC* 1: 132). This description, however, seems to proffer a different type of critique of religions, targeting the individual's hypocrisy more so than an examination of the sources of religion and religious art.

5. The sections of *Les Paradis artificiels* that I am interested in here, "Le Poème du hachisch" and "Un mangeur d'opium," were written primarily between 1857 and 1860 (see Claude Pichois's documentation in the *Œuvres complètes* 1: 1365–66). Accordingly, the passages quoted here are contemporaneous to, or slightly precede, the *Salon de 1859*.

6. The English translation is Ellen Fox's (Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradise* 78).

7. It is true that the Catholic approach to prayer may include meditating on and the intercession of the Saints. However, Baudelaire unquestionably pushes the boundaries of "méditation" beyond orthodoxy by including Greek (or "pagan") figures, figures from other religions, and secular figures such as Poe. Also, Baudelaire's lack of discussion of prayer or meditation as communication with God is striking. For a more general study of prayer in Baudelaire's works, see *La Poésie précaire* in which Jérôme Thélot interprets

Baudelaire's treatment of prayer as a sign of a crisis of faith. Prayer, for Baudelaire, Thélot argues, betrays concomitantly a desire to keep the faith and an abiding sense of his impossibility to do so. Thélot associates this crisis of faith in Baudelaire's work with the poet's lack of faith in the poetic "Idéal," and in poetry *tout court* (31–62).

8. For an ironic reading of "La Femme sauvage et la petite-maîtresse," see *Baudelaire's "Le Spleen de Paris,"* in which Maria Scott argues that the poem's irony targets the male speaker (42).

9. In *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony*, Sonya Stephens's reading of the poem's conclusion argues that the narrator-poet's "appeal to God asserts recognition of the monstrous as a human condition" (146).

10. For an interpretation of the poem as a social critique, see especially Scott's chapter on "Prostitution" in *Baudelaire's "Le Spleen de Paris"* 69. In his study, Murphy contends that "Mademoiselle Bistouri" exposes the dilemma that arises as a result of the blurry border between the psychic and the somatic ("Le dilemme des médecins et de Mlle Bistouri résulte de la frontière floue entre le psychique et le somatique […]"; 512). E. Kaplan interprets the prose poem as an example of the narrator's "relinquishing [of] his pride before divine mystery." Overwhelmed by injustice, the narrator abandons all reason in the concluding prayer by turning humbly to God. I contend that Kaplan's reading of the prayer neglects the irony in the narrator's voice, and therefore offers a diametrically opposed interpretation of the narrator's perspective on the divine (*Baudelaire's Prose Poems* 145–51).

11. The English translation is Edward Kaplan's (Baudelaire, *The Parisian Prowler* 118).

12. As a rule, prayer in *Le Spleen de Paris* is presented in an ironic mode. Similar to "Mademoiselle Bistouri," the prayer that concludes "Le Joueur généreux" places in question the existence of God as well as underscores the hypocrisy of prayer: "En me couchant, faisant encore ma prière par un reste d'habitude imbecile, je répétais dans un demi-sommeil: 'Mon Dieu! Seigneur, mon Dieu! faites que le diable me tienne sa parole!'" (*OC* 1: 328).

Chapter Two: The Mourning of God and the Ironies of Secularization in Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*

1. In his study, Fondane forms two substantial lists of quotes in which the poet appears repeatedly to contradict himself, either by affirming or by renouncing his faith (294). The statements made by the poet to which Fondane refers can be found in Baudelaire's *Œuvres complètes* (1: 673, 682) and *Correspondance* (151).

2. Baudelaire's journal intimately juxtaposes his admiration and his disdain for the priesthood, which he regards as both the noblest profession alongside the poet, as well as the leading group of society's pedants, and which he compares to judges and politicians. Fragment 26 reads "Il n'y a de

grand parmi les hommes que le poète, le prêtre et le soldat," whereas fragment 28 reads "De la cuistrerie: des professeurs, des juges, des prêtres, et des ministres" (*OC* 1: 693–94).

3. Richard Burton advocates this interpretation of Baudelaire's belief system. See the conclusion of "'La douleur est donc un bien.' Baudelaire et Blanc de Saint Bonnet. Contribution à l'étude du politique et du religieux chez Baudelaire," in which Burton describes "l'extrême pauvreté christologique de la pensée baudelairienne" as one in which the only truth is that of the Fall of Man. For Burton, if Baudelaire is a Catholic, he is a "'catholique' sans Christ" (255).

4. For an in-depth study of the effects of the plebiscite on Baudelaire's poetry, see Burton's *Baudelaire and the Second Republic* 142–84. Other scholars have also discussed specific events of Baudelaire's biography as further contributing to his abandonment of idealism. Biographer Joanna Richardson describes the transformation of the poet's platonic relationship with Mme Sabatier into a physical one as a substantial "demystification" of Baudelaire's attitude toward human relationships: "For five years, Baudelaire had worshipped her as an ideal; now he saw that she was only a woman" (255).

5. See also Walter Benjamin's seminal study for Baudelairean studies, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.

6. See, for instance, Ainslee Armstrong McLees's *Baudelaire's "Argo plastique": Poetic Caricature and Modernism*, which analyzes several poems as caricatures of their own romanticism or idealism.

7. I borrow the term "part-object lyricism" from Holland, who utilizes it to describe the metaphorical and metonymical axes that establish correspondences and partial decoding of these correspondences in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (219).

8. Jean Pommier's aptly titled *La Mystique de Baudelaire* analyzes the poem as an application of Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical writings on the correspondences between the celestial and the earthly realms, and Charles Fourier's theory of universal analogy in which objects as diverse as planetary rotation, language, and human anatomy can be illuminated through their comparison to one another. In *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*, Reuven Tsur's brilliant analysis of the cognitive poetics of "Correspondances" explains its "mystic communion" of the material and the spiritual as one that engages the reader in intuiting rather than knowing, whereby the less differentiated senses of smell and sound infuse the individual's natural environment with an awareness of the sacred and the supernatural (455–66). In *On the Shore of Nothingness*, Tsur also describes the mystic nature of other poems by Baudelaire, including "Hymne" and "Le Léthé" (250–61).

9. Biographies of Baudelaire testify to the Catholic environment in which he grew up, both at home, and while boarding at the Collège royal in Lyon and the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris. See especially chapter 5 of Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler's *Baudelaire*. During his years at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand (1836–39), religious devotion among both faculty and students was at a peak. In *Du Collège de Clermont au Lycée Louis-le-Grand (1563–1920)*, Gustave Dupont-Ferrier explains that prayers were recited "en étude, matin

et soir," classes would begin and end by a brief prayer in Latin, and confession and attendance at chapel were obligatory. Dupont-Ferrier indicates that a record number of students voluntarily took Communion at Easter (459–60). Furthermore, Baudelaire's personal journal, correspondence, letters from his classmates, and student reports consistently describe Baudelaire's attitude toward the Catholic faith as sincere and respectful. See the *Œuvres complètes* (1: 706, 1229), *Correspondance* (1: 66–67), and Pichois and Ziegler (95–119). As Pichois and Ziegler note, Baudelaire's trimester evaluations repeatedly suggested that he was a disciplined, practicing Catholic (106). Even for a few years after graduation, the poet frequented a primarily Catholic milieu: he lived in several Catholic boarding houses, befriended many pious Catholics at the residences, and wrote his first poems in a Catholic spirit. See Jean Mourot's *Baudelaire. Les Fleurs du Mal* 25. See also the poems "Hélas! Qui n'a gémi sur autrui" and "Tout là-haut" (*OC* 1: 199–201, 1229).

10. "Elle se répand dans ma vie / Comme un air imprégné de sel, / Et dans mon âme inassouvie / Verse le goût de l'éternel" (*OC* 1: 162). Although "Hymne" was not published in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the poem is contemporary to the collection, written in 1854 and published in 1857.

11. In fact, many translations of the Hebrew Scriptures utilize "L'Éternel" to refer to God or "the Lord" as the most common substitute for Yahweh.

12. See Martine Bercot's "Baudelaire: Poésie et prière" 5–6.

13. For a more in-depth analysis of "Réversibilité" in the context of Catholic theology and the writings of Joseph de Maistre, see Jean Pellegrin's "'*Réversibilité*' de Baudelaire."

14. "Il me conduit ainsi, loin du regard de Dieu […] / Et jette dans mes yeux pleins de confusion / Des vêtements souillés, des blessures ouvertes, / Et l'appareil sanglant de la Destruction!" (*OC* 1: 111).

15. As Fondane eloquently explains, the poet is responding to the need to feel himself exist, to break with the monotony of the quotidian, and it is through pain that he most acutely feels alive. For Baudelaire "un besoin se fait jour de se sentir *exister*, de rompre la *monotonie* de l'être. […] Et qu'est-ce qui mieux *révèle* l'existence, sinon ce sentiment de douleur?" (331; Fondane's emphasis).

16. In a similar quote, Baudelaire conflates cruelty with desire: "Cruauté et volupté, sensations identiques, comme l'extrême chaud et l'extrême froid" (*OC* 1: 683). Baudelaire's equation of pleasure and cruelty is also the subject of many prose poems that portray deliberate acts of evil as the means to satisfy the individual's profound need to feel relieved of the numbing state of *ennui*. See "La Fausse monnaie," "Le Mauvais vitrier," and "Le Joueur généreux."

17. Emphasis is Baudelaire's. In the poet's defense, Baudelaire's attorney argued that the lengthy descriptions of human vice in *Les Fleurs du Mal* were intended to discourage evil ("flétrir le mal"; *OC* 1: 1210). However, Baudelaire's presentation of the esthetic side of evil is too compelling to have been designed to dissuade readers.

18. For a historical study of the co-development of print culture and politics in mid-nineteenth-century France, see "A Counterrevolution in Print"

in Thomas Cragin's *Murder in the Streets of Paris: Manufacturing Crime and Justice in the Popular Press, 1830–1900*. Priscilla Robertson has commented on the significant growth in newspaper circulations, noting that in the year 1848 alone, no less than 479 newspapers were founded in Paris (*Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* 55).

19. Collins quotes the following proclamation pronounced by Charles de Montalembert: "My choice is made. I am for authority against revolt, for conservation against destruction, for society against socialism, for the possible liberty of the good against the certain liberty of evil. And in the great struggle between the two forces that divide the world, I believe, in acting thus, to be still, to-day, as always, for Catholicism against the Revolution" (322). And in another quote by Montalembert, this time from *L'Ami de la religion*: "If the socialist contagion should even encroach upon the children of the Church, if a portion of our Catholic youth had the misfortune to open its mind or heart to these fallacious doctrines, truly then the evil would seem irreparable […] and there would remain nothing more to do than to weep over the ruins of a society condemned to die within the embrace of an incurable anarchy" (Collins 133).

20. In *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830–1852*, Edward Berenson gives voter statistics that demonstrate how influential the démoc-socs were in France. In the electoral contest of May 1849, for example, the party claimed 35 percent of the votes (xiii). Berenson explains that "despite their divergent backgrounds," all members developed "a belief in the need to resurrect the moral principles of early Christianity in order to provide a new foundation for the nation's economic life. It was this shared Christian-moral commitment that provided the intellectual basis for the entente of republicans and socialists during the Second Republic" (xxi).

21. Félicité de Lamennais was among the leading Catholic advocates of social change. As Berenson states: "In *Le livre du peuple* (1837) […] Lamennais proclaimed that God created all men equal but that princes had made them unequal. Democracy was the only political system consistent with Christian teaching because it guaranteed the human equality that Jesus promised" (49). Berenson further states that "Lamennais anticipated Louis Blanc's struggle to wrest the mantle of religious legitimacy away from the ruling elite and bestow it on the democratic movement. He sought to deny conservatives the moral authority they enjoyed as a result of what he considered an unholy association with Catholicism" (50).

22. Collins states, for example, that the Cathedral of Notre Dame, "which had once heard the praise of divine-right monarchy […] now rang with the voice of a champion of the rights of the people" (28).

23. For a summary of the theorist's religious and political thought, see "Proudhon's Romantic Rebellion," in which Crapo quotes Proudhon's harsh critique of Jesus Christ: "L'inconséquent réformateur fut crucifié. Après lui, pharisiens, publicains, prêtres et rois reparurent, plus oppresseurs, plus rapaces, plus infâmes que jamais" (184).

24. In *Baudelaire and the Second Republic*, Burton devotes much attention to the teachings of Joseph Proudhon, and highlights the following provocative statement of the social theorist: "Dieu, c'est sottise et lâcheté; Dieu, c'est hypocrisie et mensonge; Dieu, c'est tyrannie et misère; Dieu, c'est le mal" (199).

25. Crapo 184. Crapo associates Proudhon with Romantic writers in his treatment of Satan: "It is in his rehabilitation of Satan and his identification with him that Proudhon most clearly reveals his close ties with romanticism" (188).

26. In *Satan franc-maçon*, Eugen Weber highlights a trend in literature in which romantic writers recast Satan in the sympathetic role of the romantic hero. Weber notes that writers portray Satan as "la plus vieille victime […], celui à qui on a fait tort" and "le premier des révoltés contre un ordre établi […], un ciel unjuste" (10). George Sand is a good example of an author who romanticized Satan by presenting him as a victim of political oppression. According to Max Milner, for Sand, Satan did not symbolize a "révolte sterile" but the "aspirations inassouvies de l'humanité souffrante." Consequently, Sand did not depict Satan as a sinister figure. Rather, she equated the role of Satan with that of Jesus; in *Consuelo*, for example, Satan walks in Jesus's footsteps by playing the role of martyr and Savior (165–66). Milner quotes the following passage from *Consuelo*: "Le plus triste après Jésus […]. Il traînait avec lui les chaînes qu'il avait brisées; et ses ailes fauves, dépouillés, pendants, portaient les traces de la violence et de la captivité. Il souriait douloureusement aux hommes souillés de crimes, et pressait les petits enfants sur son sein" (168).

27. Eugen Weber states the following: "Ainsi, Satan n'est pas nécessairement le Mal, bien qu'en ce rôle il ait aussi sa place. Très souvent, il est […] l'opposition à l'ordre établi […]. Et cette opposition devait suggérer une autre incarnation de Satan, celle de héros révolutionnaire […] dans un sens non seulement littéraire mais politique" (10).

28. Chambers's overarching thesis is that writers who published under the Second Empire, which imposed a system of self-censorship in order to stifle political opposition to the regime, practiced a writing of "opposition" in which the obvious or narrative dimension of a work would hide an altogether contrary message within a more covert, "textual" or "between the lines" dimension. According to Chambers, there developed "a space of play, a duplicitous gap," in which a symbol or figure could signify on one level the exact opposite of the meaning that it conveys on another (122).

29. The two "satanic" poems that come after "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" follow in the Romantic tradition. In "Abel et Caïn" and "Les Litanies de Satan," Satan is praised as the prime revolutionary figure who shares in the sufferings of humanity and, in the ultimate act of revolt, dethrones an oppressive God (or the divinely sanctioned regime). Burton is right to reference both Proudhon's exclamatory "Dieu, c'est le mal" and the established romantic portrayal of Satan as savior in accounting for the sources of

Baudelaire's inspiration here (196–99). "Les Litanies de Satan" presents itself as a genuine prayer to the angelic Rebel. The title presents the poem as a litany, and accordingly alternates between descriptions of the fallen angel as the unmerited victim of a jealous and severe God and a refrain that implores Satan's pity (*OC* 1: 123–25). In light of the "satanic" nature of the prayer, the question arises concerning its sincerity. As Burton has argued, the poem expresses genuine sentiment, shared by many Romantics and socialists of the time, of admiration for the biblical figure of Satan. In many Romantic poems and socialist tracts, as in Baudelaire's litany, Satan is depicted as the protector of all exiles and conspirators against the existing order (199). Although "Les Litanies de Satan," as a prayer-poem to a "revolutionary" god, renders it unorthodox, its expression of desire to be heard by a sympathetic spiritual figure is authentic. In light of the socialists' alienation from the Church in its rebellion against the altar-throne alliance of the French monarchy, Satan emerged as a logical figure to fill the need for a sympathetic deity. Another way to interpret the poem is to consider its rebellious sentiment as a reaffirmation of Christian dualism and the recognition of God's power. As a poem of "Révolte," the penultimate section of the collection, "Les Litanies de Satan" is featured as a prayer-act of rebellion against God just before the poet contemplates his mortality in the collection's final suite of poems aptly titled "La Mort."

30. "Grand merci! je n'ai que faire de cette pacotille d'êtres qui, sans doute, ne valent pas mieux que mon pauvre moi. Bien que j'aie quelque honte à me souvenir, je ne veux rien oublier" (*OC* 1: 308–09).

31. Scholars have highlighted a similar commentary on the Second Empire's dispossession of the poor in "Les Yeux des pauvres." See Marie Maclean's *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment* 116.

32. The juxtaposition of the waking state and the dream state in "Les Tentations" can be compared with the division between the Real and the Imaginary in "La Chambre double." E. Kaplan provides a compelling analysis of the prose poem as a rejection of the Ideal as an effect of drugs, and as a move toward an ethical position that embraces the "real world," even in all of its harshness (27–34).

33. In sum, Stephens interprets the conclusion of the poem as one in which "faith is challenged by a deep-rooted disbelief" (139).

34. See also my analysis in Chapter 1 of "Mademoiselle Bistouri" as a powerful example of Baudelaire's use of irony as a counterforce to the abiding allure of the religious.

35. See E. Kaplan's translation of "Perte d'auréole" in Baudelaire's *The Parisian Prowler* 113. All English renderings of *Le Spleen de Paris* are taken from Edward Kaplan's translation.

36. Clewell elaborates on this in her article, 45.

37. For others' discussion of the constant shift in tones and perspective in *Le Spleen de Paris*, see Hiddleston 20, and Scott 204–05.

38. Johnson states: "Ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard si cette héroïne […] s'appelle 'Bénédicta': 'Bien Dite.' Elle est l'image même d'une poésie que

Baudelaire ne cesse d'enterrer" (76).

39. For an overview of French symbolism, including the roles that Baudelaire and Verlaine played in the movement's development, see Laurence M. Porter's *The Crisis of French Symbolism* 1–26.

40. For a detailed account of Verlaine's conversion, see Petitfils 187–207.

41. Descriptions of the poet's sufferings as a blessing of God abound in poem II, 1: "Ô MON DIEU, vous m'avez blessé d'amour / Et la blessure est encore vibrante, / Ô mon Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour. / Ô mon Dieu, votre crainte m'a frappé / Et la brûlure est encor là qui tonne, / Ô mon Dieu, votre crainte m'a frappé. […] / Voici mon sang que je n'ai pas versé, / Voici ma chair indigne de souffrance, / Voici mon sang que je n'ai pas versé" (Verlaine 264–65).

42. "Mon fils est mort. J'adore, ô mon Dieu, votre loi. / Je vous offre les pleurs d'un cœur presque parjure; Vous châtiez bien fort et parferez la foi / Qu'alanguissait l'amour pour une créature" (Verlaine 443).

Chapter Three: Sublimation and Conversion in Zola and Huysmans

1. For examples of description in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* of Thérèse and Laurent's physiology as an explanation of their acts of adultery and murder, see pp. 22–26, 39, 49, 85.

2. Rivers explains that in Zola's fiction, "body reading is necessary and possible in theory, while simultaneously […] impossible in practice for all but the most exceptional 'readers'" (206).

3. In Chapter 4, we will explore questions of theodicy in Zola's later works. It should be noted that like God, the police too prove impotent before Camille's murder: "La police avait passé à côté de son crime, et la police n'avait rien vu; elle était dupée, elle venait de l'aquitter" (*Thérèse Raquin* 92). It is not a coincidence that the Raquins' friend, le vieux Michaux, is a retired police officer, and that despite his weekly visits to the Raquin household for a game of cards, he never suspects foul play.

4. Emphasis added. Similarly, the scar on Laurent's neck, which he acquired while drowning Camille, is described as a bodily force that inflicts torture on his being: "Le morceau de son cou où se trouvait la cicatrice ne lui semblait plus appartenir à son corps; c'était comme de la chair étrangère qu'on aurait collée en cet endroit, comme une viande empoisonnée qui pourrissait ses propres muscles" (Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* 228).

5. "[Nana] se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l'avait pourri" (Zola, *Rougon-Macquart* 2: 1485).

6. "[Son] corps, imprégné d'alcool, degage[a] un gaz inconnu, capable de s'enflammer spontanément et de dévorer la chair et les os" (Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal* 275).

7. See *Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française* (ed. 2000) 892, 1497.

8. Kant's description of a natural object's excessive agitation of the mind is poetically figured in Baudelaire's prose poem "*Le Confiteor de l'artiste*," in which the immensity of sky and sea cause the artist's nerves to painfully vibrate and instill a sense of psychic dissolution (*OC* 1: 278).

9. Many scholars have written on the anxiety expressed in Zola's stories toward female sexuality. See especially Chantal Bertrand-Jennings's *L'Éros et la femme chez Zola*.

10. This is not to say that male characters' perception of Nana as a terrifying monster is not shared by the extra-diegetic narrator himself. In the following passage, as Bertrand-Jennings has noted, Nana's metamorphosis into a hungry and devastating monster is imagined not by one of the male characters, but by the equally transfixed narrator: "Elle demeurait seule, debout au milieu des richesses entassées de son hôtel, avec un peuple d'hommes abattus à ses pieds. Comme les monstres antiques dont le domaine redouté était couvert d'ossements, elle posait les pieds sur des crânes; […] et, tandis que dans une gloire, son sexe montait et rayonnait sur ses victimes étendues, pareil à un soleil levant qui éclaire un champ de carnage, elle gardait son inconscience de bête superbe, ignorante de sa besogne, bonne fille toujours" (Zola, *Rougon-Macquart* 2: 1470).

11. We get a hint of this as early as *Thérèse Raquin*, in which the eponymous heroine is presented as the more bestial of the two evildoers (22, 25–26). In fact, her passion becomes a corrupting influence on Laurent; the nervous nature of her sex is depicted as a contagion that infects her lover's body: "La passion de Thérèse lui avait communiqué un mal effroyable. […] [Thérèse] avait fait pousser dans ce grand corps, gras et mou, un système nerveux d'une sensibilité étonnante […]. Une existence nerveuse, poignante et nouvelle pour lui, lui fut brusquement révélée, aux premiers baisers de sa maîtresse […]. Les nerfs dominèrent, et il tomba dans les angoisses qui secouent les corps et les esprits détraqués" (159–60). After *Thérèse Raquin,* Zola's literary imagination aggrandizes woman as a repository of evil that menaces the social (patriarchal) order. In the chapter entitled "La Femme maléfique" of *L'Éros et la femme chez Zola,* Bertrand-Jennings provides a study of Zola's "evil women" in the *Rougon-Macquart*, including "[la tante] Dide [dont la folie] est à l'origine de la plupart des maux des Rougon et des Macquart," and her numerous offspring of femmes fatales, such as Rosemonde and Silviane in *Paris* (1898), Marthe and Félicité in *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873), Clorinde in *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (1876), Sévérine and Flore in *La Bête humaine* (1890), Mme Josserand in *Pot Bouille* (1882), and most certainly Nana in *Nana*, "qui détient les records de tous les maléfices féminins" (65).

12. In *Le Docteur Pascal*, the title character, as Zola's fictional double, elaborates on what may be called the "heredity of evil," in which he attributes the "immoral" behavior of his extended family to "original sins" of earlier gen-

erations (96). Other "anthropological myths" in Zola that trace pathological behavior back to an original act include impregnation, in which a woman's first sexual lover transmits to her his physical and moral qualities. She subsequently passes them on to her future children, even if they are technically fathered by a later lover. As such, Borie explains, "la défloration […] a valeur de mythe" (*Zola* 58).

13. Borie explains that "L'homme primitif subit de la part de sa compagne, une trahison originaire dont le ressentiment anime encore ses descendants" (*Zola* 44).

14. Ripoll does partially retract his position by pointing out that the final passage of the novel—in which the train is depicted as a raging monster, deprived of its mechanic and its driver, and charging endlessly into the night—reasserts the dominance of animality and the subconscious over civilization (833). This interpretation does not, however, undo the mechanisms of sublimation in *La Bête humaine*. Rather, it suggests a persistent fear of the body that the mechanisms of sublimation cannot entirely subdue or permanently transform.

15. Emphasis added. Henri Mitterand quotes Zola in Zola's *Œuvres complètes* 8: 977.

16. "[Denise] se sentait perdue, toute petite dans le monstre, dans la machine encore au repos, tremblant d'être prise par le branle dont les murs frémissaient déjà. Et la pensée de la boutique du *Vieil Elbeuf,* noire et étroite, agrandissait encore pour elle le vaste magasin, le lui montrait doré de lumière, pareil à une ville, avec ses monuments, ses places, ses rues, où il lui semblait impossible qu'elle trouvât jamais sa route" (*Rougon-Macquart* 3: 434).

17. As Nelson explains: "For the price of Denise's hand is the internal reorganization of Mouret's store along humanitarian lines—which looks forward to the Fourieristic system of social cooperation that forms the basis of Luc Froment's ideal community" (72).

18. Sublimation, for Freud, is the partial satisfaction of desire.

19. In Chapter 4, we will examine the in-depth treatment of mystical substitution in Huysmans's *Les Foules de Lourdes*.

20. See James Laver's *The First Decadent: Being the Strange Life of J. K. Huysmans*, which treats almost all of Huysmans's works of fiction as essentially autobiography. See also Baldick's *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans*, especially the pages devoted to the treatment of conversion in *En route*, 202–09.

21. This is Laver's summary of the reactions of some of Huysmans's contemporaries to the author's claims of conversion (243).

22. See the introduction and chapter 1 of Smeets's *Huysmans l'inchangé* 9–54.

23. See James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* 139–56.

24. See Huysmans's "Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman," in *À Rebours* 62.

25. See John E. Smith's introduction in James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* xxxiii.

Chapter Four: The Staging of Doubt: Zola and Huysmans on Lourdes

1. "Open space" is actually an expression coined by Taylor to refer to the phenomenon that James describes in *The Will to Believe,* in which competing visions of the world prevent individuals from believing in one vision without themselves on some level of consciousness doubting that vision and imagining the possibility of the "other" perspective. See *The Will to Believe* 1–31, and Taylor 549–51.

2. For a history of the Lourdes shrine, see Ruth Harris's *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* and Jacques Noiray's Préface to Zola's *Lourdes*.

3. In the concluding paragraph of his article, Charcot states: "Est-ce à dire que, dès à présent, nous connaissions tout dans ce domaine du surnaturel tributaire au premier chef de la *faith-healing* et qui voit tous les jours ses frontières se rétrécir sous l'influence des acquisitions scientifiques? Certainement non. Il faut, tout en cherchant toujours, savoir attendre. Je suis le premier à reconnaître qu'aujourd'hui: 'There are more things in heaven and hearth, Than are dreamt of in our philosophy" (38). For a study of the ambivalence of Charcot's *La Foi qui guérit*, see Goetz, Bonduelle, and Gelfand's *Charcot: Constructing Neurology* 165–66.

4. "L'avenir appartiendrait à celui ou à ceux qui auront saisi l'âme de la société moderne, qui, se dégageant des théories trop rigoureuses, consentiront à une acceptation plus logique, plus attendrie de la vie. Je crois à une peinture de la vérité plus large, plus complexe, à une ouverture plus grande sur l'humanité, à une sorte de classicisme du naturalisme" (qtd. by Noiray in his Préface to Zola, *Lourdes* 8).

5. Also qtd. by Noiray 9; and by Ternois 148.

6. These nine pages can be found at the bibliothèque Méjanes in Aix-en-Provence, ms. 1456, fos 208–16, or on the world wide web at e-corpus.org.

7. As Ternois explains, "On lui a présenté Clémentine Trouvé, on lui a montré un talon cicatrisé, mais il n'a pas vu dans quel état était ce talon l'année précédente" (206).

8. "Zola n'est pas convaincu, mais il est embarrassé" (Ternois 205).

9. Letter from Huysmans to Jean de Caldain (12 Mar. 1903), published in Pierre Lambert's 1958 edition of *Les Foules de Lourdes* 259.

10. Qtd. and trans. by Frederick Brown 680.

11. My interpretation of Zola's novel as an opening toward the unknown is corroborated by the author's contemporaneous profession to the Catholic writer Henri Lesserre de Monzie that he did not deny the unknown. He explained to Lesserre, rather, that his only protest was the Church's enveloping the unknown in dogma. See Brown's biography of Zola, p. 679.

12. The character of Marie in fact closely mirrors the scientist's discussion of Mlle Corin. Like the latter, Marie suffers from paralysis after falling from a horse.

13. See Marcel Vuillaume's methodical study of the characteristics of free indirect discourse in "La Signalisation du style indirect libre."

14. Huysmans himself described *Les Foules de Lourdes* as consisting of organized sketches and notes; qtd. by Banks 133.

15. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Huysmans, *Les Foules de Lourdes* are taken from the 1993 edition.

16. As Cogny states, the *Foules* text is the result of "une enquête longue et mystérieuse sur les miracles" (243).

17. Two other examples deserve mention. Another passage of *Les Foules* in which Huysmans's narrator seems to be responding directly to a "challenge" posed by Zola involves the description of the Church of the Rosary. Zola's *Lourdes* paints an utterly uninspiring image of the Rosaire, whose "hideous" and somber architecture and art appear to cast doubt on the presence of the divine (320). The *Les Foules de Lourdes* narrative picks up where Zola's description leaves off. Whereas the narrator is in agreement with observations made in Zola's *Lourdes* (on the utter ugliness of the church), he arrives at a very different conclusion. The lengthy commentary on the art of the church is quite in character for the esthete that Huysmans was. So appalled by the ugliness of the church, the narrator draws the conclusion that only the devil can be responsible (121). In contrast to Zola, whose description of the church does not convey any sense of the supernatural, Huysmans's narrator dismisses such a reaction by asserting that the church bespeaks the undeniable presence of the devil, and consequently of the divine. To cite one more example, in response to a large segment of *Lourdes* that unveils the stories of greed and struggles for power among the priests who converted the Grotto into a national shrine and that paints a disturbing image of the commercial commodification of the shrine, Huysmans's narrative documents rather a community at Lourdes based on great acts of charity that the narrator himself observes and that can only be explained, he argues, by divine inspiration (105, 183).

18. In following Huysmans's reasoning, Ziegler states, "if suffering liquidates guilt, balancing the ledger of vice and virtue, then the miraculous healings performed by the Virgin retard the process of purification that penitents take" (325).

Chapter Five: Religious and Secular Conversions: Transformations in Céline's Medical Perspective on Evil

1. Unless indicated by brackets, the frequent use of ellipses in quotes from Céline's works are part of the original text.

2. James Steel, in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, ou le discours social chez Céline," states,"L'épisode de l'abbé Protiste […] permet à Céline de régler quelques comptes et surtout d'affirmer la supériorité du médecin […]. [L'épisode] montre à quel point le regard du médecin est souvent ce qui guide la plume de l'artiste" (267).

3. When the child Bébert lies on his deathbed in the grips of typhoid fever, Bardamu states, "On n'est jamais très mécontent qu'un adulte s'en aille, ça fait toujours une vache de moins sur la terre, qu'on se dit, tandis que pour un enfant, c'est tout de même moins sûr. Il y a l'avenir" (Céline, *Voyage* 279).

4. Alice Kaplan describes Céline as a "symbol of evil" in "Literature and Collaboration" 967.

5. The anti-Semitic pamphlet was a specific literary genre that flourished during the inter-war years and under the German Occupation. As A. Kaplan states, it "had an audience in both zones of France among those who blamed the Jews for France's defeat" ("Literature and Collaboration" 967).

6. As A. Kaplan states, "By the end of the war [Céline] was receiving drawings of tombstones in his daily mail. […] Céline had good reason to fear for his life […]" ("Literature and Collaboration" 967).

7. Later, Bardamu generalizes this difference by stating, "J'avais une sale gueule, voilà tout" (Céline, *Voyage* 116).

8. See René Girard's *Le Bouc émissaire*.

9. This tradition began as early as the 1960s, in which scholars, in order to account for inconsistencies between the novels and the pamphlets, offered what can be called the "two-Céline" argument. Like most of Céline's initial readers, they interpreted *Voyage* as a leftist novel, and perceived the publication of his blatantly anti-Semitic *Bagatelles pour un massacre* as a clear sign that the writer "changed his mind." They therefore hypothesized that the years immediately preceding the publication of *Bagatelles* represented "la naissance d'une obsession," and that Céline the novelist was of a different mindset from Céline the pamphleteer. See Maurice Bardèche's *Louis-Ferdinand Céline*, Jacqueline Morand's "Les Idées politiques de L.-F. Céline," Albert Chesneau's *Essai de psychocritique de L.-F. Céline*, and Erika Ostrovsky's *Voyeur, voyant: A Portrait of Louis-Ferdinand Céline*.

10. *Henri Godard présente "Mort à crédit" de Louis-Ferdinand Céline* 82–83. According to Godard, if any argument can be made that *Mort à crédit*, published just prior to *Bagatelles*, prefigures Céline's pamphlet writing, that conclusion is due only to the violent nature of its narrative, but a violence that is in no way directed toward Jews (82–83).

11. See Godard's *Poétique de Céline*, especially chapter 3, "Ecriture et idéologie," 183–208. Godard argues that the nature of Céline's poetics—his brilliant use of argot, literary terms, and archaic vocabulary—naturally undoes any reactionary sentiment that may surface.

12. In *Les Idées de Céline*, Alméras dates the writer's anti-Semitism back to 1916 (12). For Alméras, Celine never "changed his mind," as early scholars had proposed, but simply concealed his hatred of Jews in his first novels. See also Alméras's "Céline's Masquerade."

13. The first phrase concerns the narrator's description of the music that he hears in a Parisian tavern, which he qualifies as "négro-judéo-saxonne." This is the only direct reference to "Jewishness" in the novel, which Alméras links to Henry Ford's anti-Semitic interpretation of Jazz music (*Les Idées de Céline* 51–53; *Je suis le bouc* 98–102). The other two phrases that Alméras mentions

are taken from the passage in which Bardamu describes Lola's friends as "de beaux garçons, bruns, frisés, son genre," and Lola's eyes as "animés par cette gentille vivacité commerciale, orientalo-fragonarde qu'ont presque tous les yeux par ici." Surprisingly, Alméras seems to downplay these phrases by presenting them as simply "[de] discrètes notions physiques et les témoignages d'érotico-mysticisme" (*Les Idées de Céline* 52).

14. In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject as that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules." It is the "in-between," "the ambiguous," that which blurs the boundaries between the self (ego) and the other or outside world, such as bodily fluids. In psychological development, the self begins to experience the abject when it starts to distance itself from the (m)other thereby constituting itself as a separate being. According to Kristeva, the abject threatens the psychological integrity of the self, because it threatens to erase the ego's boundaries that constitute its self-identification. As a psychic defense, the self sublimates the abject in order to keep it under control. Sublimation of the abject "transforms death drive into a start of life, a new significance." See the chapter "Approaching Abjection," 4–31.

15. In *Mea culpa*, Céline's main argument is that the failures of Communism demonstrate, above all, that the individual cannot escape his own evil nature: "Ce qui séduit dans le Communisme, l'immense avantage à vrai dire, c'est qu'il va nous démasquer l'Homme, enfin! Le débarrasser des 'excuses'" (7).

16. Above all, Céline's novels highlight the soldiers' feeling of absurdity and helplessness in war. As Bardamu states: "La guerre en somme c'était tout ce qu'on ne comprenait pas" (*Voyage* 12). At the beginning of *Guignol's Band I*, the narrator describes his impression of war not as strategic actions but in terms of violent tornados that wreak havoc wherever they land: "On est écrasés sous la trombe, trempés, roulés, raplatis par le cyclone… revomis […]. Ça doit venir des coins des petits nuages" (15–16).

17. Henri Godard certainly had in mind Bardamu's description of the *Ranciers* in summarizing Céline's vision of modern man as "victim" and as "oppressed." Godard states: "Les différents aspects du siècle auxquels est tour à tour confronté Bardamu trouvent leur unité d'abord dans le point de vue commun d'où ils apparaissent, celui des victimes et des écrasés" (*Henri Godard présente "Voyage"* 25).

18. Stallybrass and White discuss common nineteenth-century perceptions of the spread of disease that social, racial, and sexual prejudice of the bourgeoisie inspired. Charles Bernheimer shows that nineteenth-century hygienists such as Parent-Duchâtelet did entertain notions of infection and contagion caused by dirt and overcrowding, but these were mixed with moral perceptions. Bernheimer, among others, also shows that in general, nineteenth-century male writers' discourse on contagion coincided with their fear of female sexuality. Novelists such as Balzac, Sue, Zola, and Huysmans described their female characters in terms of disease, excrement, and decay (2).

19. See Frédéric Vitoux's biography *La Vie de Céline* 151–60. In Céline's *Romans I*, Godard recurrently highlights the parallel between Bardamu's

experiences in Rancy and Céline's written commentary on Clichy by comparing Céline's medical writings with the *Voyage* narrative.

20. Céline, *Cahiers Céline 3: "Semmelweis" et autres écrits médicaux* 56, 78, 162, 188–89, 202. Godard has asserted that Céline, while writing *Voyage*, demonstrated "[un] désir de faire de la recherche et, en même temps de guérir, ou de prévenir les maladies par l'hygiène." In his notice to the Pléiade edition to *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, Godard states: "Les lettres dans lesquelles il expose ses programmes d'enquête forment ainsi un accompagnement à ses articles et achèvent d'attester la permanence de cette préoccupation tandis que d'autre part, laborieusement, il écrit *Voyage au bout de la nuit*" (Céline, *Romans I* 1148–50). Steel also attests to the parallel between the socio-medical scope of Céline's "écrits médicaux" and *Voyage*: "Il y a d'ailleurs continuité dans le discours social de Céline, car on retrouve des échos de toutes ces préoccupations concernant la sécurité de l'emploi, le gâtisme industriel, les maladies endémiques en banlieue, à l'usine, dans les logements insalubres, dans ses écrits littéraires dès *Voyage* et dans ses écrits socio-médicaux dès 1923" (273).

21. As Godard has pointed out, "miteux" appears sixteen times in *Voyage*, and designates a "mélange d'exploitation, d'injustice et malchance qui les a faits ce qu'ils sont" (*Henri Godard présente "Voyage"* 26).

22. Qtd. by Godard in *Henri Godard présente "Voyage"* 525.

23. In "Sources and Quotations," Alice Kaplan states that "The Jewish community [Céline] targets specifically is […] the entire international assimilationist Jewish community whose activities in the arenas of commerce, literature, and the arts he is obsessively monitoring" (35).

24. Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* 20.

25. For an in-depth study of this tradition of medieval imagery, see especially Trachtenberg, chapter 1, "Devil Incarnal"; and chapter 3, "With Horns and Tails" 11–31 and 44–53.

26. McCarren argues that Céline's "preaching of biological 'fact'" draws from nineteenth-century theories in "pathological anatomy" (185). As Sander Gilman has shown in *The Jew's Body*, in nineteenth-century medicine, the medieval portrayal of the Jew was placed in scientific context: "By the nineteenth century, with the establishment of the hegemony of 'science' within European culture, there is no space more highly impacted with the sense of difference about the body of the Jew than the public sphere of 'medicine'" (38–39).

27. Regarding nineteenth-century medical theory, Gilman states: "No aspect of the Jewish body in that sphere, whether fabled or real, is free from the taint of the claim of the special nature of the Jewish body as a sign of the inherent difference of the Jew" (38).

28. As Philippe Roussin points out: "The nineteenth-century novelist as the social investigator, the hygienist, or the ethnologist is the one who tells us the 'hidden truth' (Balzac, *Facino Cane*), who goes from the 'known to the unknown' (Zola, *Le roman expérimental*), who works to trace the effect back to the cause, the 'reason for social effects,' the 'hidden meaning' (Balzac, *La Comédie humaine*), and who correlates external signs with internal lesions,

identifying the pathologies of and the remedies for the social body" (254). See also *Face Value*, in which Christopher Rivers explains how Balzac's and Zola's narrators pose as accurate readers of the body upon which truth is inscribed.

29. This quote is cited by Rivers in *Face Value* 176.

30. In this passage, Céline is speaking of a particular Jew, his former boss at the League of Nations.

31. As Gilman has shown, there were strong anti-Semitic tendencies in nineteenth-century medicine. Scientists who perceived the Jew as dangerous to society frequently analyzed traits of the "Semitic" body in terms of disease: "The very analysis of the nature of the Jewish body, in the broader culture or within the culture of medicine, has always been linked to establishing the difference (and dangerousness) of the Jew. This scientific vision of parallel and unequal 'races' is part of the polygenetic argument about the definition of 'race' within the scientific culture of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century it is more strongly linked to the idea that some 'races' are inherently weaker, 'degenerate,' more at risk for certain types of diseases than others. In the world of nineteenth-century medicine, this difference becomes labeled as the 'pathological' or 'pathogenic' qualities of the Jewish body" (39). Gilman explains how the Jewish foot, nose, skin type, and circumcision marked him as diseased. He states, "What had been an objection based on the Jew's religion came to be pathologized as an objection to the Jewish body" (43). Gilman's study also shows that the Jewish body was perceived as highly susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. Syphilis, for instance, was considered a Jewish disease, and became a symbol for the Jewish threat to the health of the social body: "In the realm of German science, as in American medicine during the same period, syphilis was associated with a racial (as well as pathognomonic) image of difference […]. Sexually transmitted disease, especially syphilis, was mythically associated with the Jewish (read: circumcised) penis […]" (218–19). And again: "There is a detailed medical literature which links the very act of circumcision with the transmission of syphilis […]. The literature on syphilis in the nineteenth century contains a substantial discussion of the special relationship of Jews to the transmission and meaning of syphilis. There is the assumption of the general risk of the Jews as the carriers of syphilis and the generalized fear that such disease would undermine the strength of the body politic" (93, 96).

32. Godard, *Poétique de Céline* 291–93. See *Henri Godard présente "Voyage"* 155–56 and *Poétique de Céline* for an in-depth study of Céline's novels and pamphlets as autobiography.

33. According to A. Kaplan, *Bagatelles* indicates that Céline was moved to write the pamphlet in response to the disparaging critique of *Mea culpa* by a Mr. Helsey, which the pamphlet directly addresses ("Sources and Quotations" 32).

34. Philippe Alméras states: "Des Juifs n'aiment pas son livre, ceux qui n'aiment pas son livre sont des Juifs et les Juifs sont notre malheur, tels sont les trois termes du syllogisme posé tout à trac par un auteur qui impose de choisir entre eux et lui […]" (*Je suis le bouc* 34).

35. "La recherche d'un apaisement à ses souffrances, un répit à son obsession taraudante de la mort, un peu de musique et de silence face aux bourdonnements du monde. En un mot, une tentative désespérée d'être heureux. Après les secousses de *Mort à crédit*, face aux orages politiques et guerriers qui grondaient aux quatre coins de l'Europe, Céline avec besoin d'un peu de répit, de magie" (Vitoux 305).

36. In my analysis of the passage of *Bagatelles* that momentarily transforms death into a beautiful dance, I have underscored that the concept of God is present even if not in the figure of a masculine deity, and that Céline's sublimation of his own death is presented as a spiritual conversion. In her study, Kristeva shows that in certain passages of the post-war novels, Céline succeeds in sublimating death without the concept of God by converting images of putrefaction into a celebration of color, sound, pure form, and lively movement. However, these sublime moments are only fleeting. As soon as luminous and emotive mental images crystallize in his fiction, they disintegrate into oblivion. Unlike in *Bagatelles*, Céline's later fiction offers us only momentary irruptions of the sublime that cannot be sustained precisely because he once again adheres to no God, no hidden Truth. Kristeva herself calls Céline's esthetics "a brilliant and dangerous beauty, fragile and obverse of radical nihilism" destined only to disappear as quickly as it emerges in "those bubbling depths that cancel our existence" (206). Given the nature of Céline's later fiction, more work lies ahead in the attempt to account for the writer's retreat from anti-Semitism after the fall of Nazi Germany.

Conclusion

1. In my article "Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones:* Evil and the Ethical Limits of the Post-Modern Narrative," I have argued that *Les Bienveillantes* (Prix Goncourt, 2006), Jonathan Littell's novel of the Nazi war criminal, illustrates precisely the importance of the faculty of thinking in combatting evil.

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About the Book

Confronting Evil: The Psychology of Secularization in Modern French Literature
Scott M. Powers
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This book uncovers a "psychology of secularization" at the core of modern literary texts. Drawing from the understanding of secularization as a phenomenon in which religion continues to exist alongside secularity in exerting influence on modern French thought, the present study enlists psychoanalytic theory on mourning and sublimation, the philosophical concept of the sublime, Charles Taylor's theory of religious and secular "cross-pressures," and William James's psychology of conversion to account for the survival of religious themes in Baudelaire, Zola, Huysmans, and Céline.

The attempt to forge a secular vision of the human condition lies at the heart of each writer's literary project, but by no means translates into a definitive "purging of God." In envisioning a godless universe, Baudelaire and Zola remain highly engaged in religious concepts and imagery, but ultimately fashion a literary style that succeeds in assuaging their influence. Special attention is devoted to literary irony in Baudelaire's and Zola's secularizing texts as a psychic reflex aimed to keep the religious at bay. In contrast, in the works of Huysmans and Céline, largely devoid of irony, conversion to Catholicism and the embrace of anti-Semitism are indicative of a psychic threshold in secular but fragile visions that chronically repress rather than engage in questions of the religious.

The concept of evil proves to be central to the psychology of secularization. How authors cope with the reality of suffering and human wickedness has a direct bearing on the ability to sustain a secular vision. Baudelaire's prose poems, Zola's experimental novels, and Huysmans's and Céline's early narratives attempt to account for evil by redefining the traditionally religious concept along secular lines. However, when unmitigated by the mechanisms of irony and sublimation, secular confrontation with the dark and seemingly absurd dimension of humanity leads modern writers such as Huysmans and Céline, paradoxically, to embrace a religious or quasi-religious understanding of good and evil.

About the Author

Scott M. Powers, Associate Professor of French at the University of Mary Washington, has authored several articles on modern and postmodern treatments of evil and secularization in Baudelaire, Zola, Céline, Beigbeder, and Littell. He has also edited a volume devoted to evil in contemporary French and Francophone literature. Research areas that intersect with his investigations into French literature on evil include Catholic theology, medical theory, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. Other publications include co-authorship of the second-year French language and culture textbook *Interaction: Langue et culture* and contributions to two volumes of the MLA *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*. Powers is currently pursuing research on the tension between the religious and the secular in Québécois literature of the twentieth century.

"This book is a fascinating study of how four influential modern French authors have wrestled with spirituality and secularization in coming to grips with the problem of evil."

—Jonathan Krell, University of Georgia